


FIFTH AVENUE BUS  
Christopher Morley



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# FIFTH AVENUE BUS

An Excursion Among the Books of  
**CHRISTOPHER MORLEY**

With a Note by The Conductor



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*Garden City, New York*

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## A NOTE BY THE CONDUCTOR

IT'S often possible to hire one of the public busses for a private party of your own. That's what the ingenious publishers have done, and have filled this large vehicle with a strangely varied group of passengers—including two who have never been in a book before. The conductor, who happens to know them all in one way or another, is naturally a little anxious whether they'll get on well together. Perhaps it depends on the seating arrangement. I don't think Kathleen ought to sit with Gabrielle Bompard. The two mothers-in-law from *Thursday Evening* had better be inside, where they won't need to climb the stairs. Roger Mifflin will certainly take Helen on top, where smoking is permitted. How about the Old Mandarin? Somehow I have a notion he'd enjoy talking to Mademoiselle de Sombreuil (with her white gloves). The girl in *The Arrow* (I never knew her name)—I'd like her to have a specially nice seat. Also Joyce and Phyllis. What about the Four Georges? How many seats will they need?

How many different moods and memories these passengers evoke when the startled conductor sees them all together. Those he must keep to himself. There will always be an empty seat for the casual reader who signals the bus at a street corner. He can sit with whomever he prefers. No riding on the platform—and please hold the hand-rail while you're on the stairs.

## PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

THE contents of FIFTH AVENUE BUS are taken from a number of Christopher Morley's books. The plates are printed just as they are in the various books, and the page numbers therefore vary and in some cases the types differ. This is done for the economy of the reader. If the plates were all remade, FIFTH AVENUE BUS would have to be sold at a much higher price.

THE RED AND WHITE GIRDLE



# I

## HUISSIER AND HUSSY

A VERY select Crime Club is that which once a year or so revisits the pages of Bataille: *Causes Criminelles et Mondaines*. Most of M. Bataille's "causes" are too strong or too frolicsome for our anæmic Anglo-Saxon tastes; a little vanishing cream has to be applied in transcribing them for English print. But what a reporter he was! A friend whose tastes are both mature and macabre tells me he is going to begin to study French. What a textbook I could compile for him out of judiciously selected Bataille! What a Beginners' French Class that might be: to meet once a week for an evening's reading, criminal and mundane.

There are reasons of my own, which will transpire presently, for an interest in a story which Bataille narrated in his volume for 1890. He calls it *L'Affaire Gouffé*. Gouffé was one of those mysterious French functionaries called a *huissier*; I have a notion, very likely wrong, that they are the people you see in the neighborhood of the Paris Bourse wearing cocked hats. I suppose bailiff is a fair translation, or sheriff's officer, or collector. My own private title for the story is *The Huissier and the Hussy*; but that gives it too light-hearted a flavor. The crime was brutal and shabby. M. Bataille, connoisseur of all shades and nuances of

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evildoing, is rather condescending toward it. He says it lacks ardent passion and mystery; it was "only a brutal assassination." True it gives us little to sentimentalize; but it has valuable elements of horror and disgust. I soften the tale here and there; but, as I have warned you before, in studying *Bataille* you are not catering to tender tastes.

M. Toussaint-Augustin Gouffé, the respectable bailiff of the rue Montmartre, closed his office on a summer afternoon (it was half past six on the 26th of July, 1889) and set off for dinner in excellent humor. In a cardboard folder behind the ledgers in his safe he had carefully put away 14,000 francs in bills; that is to say, in the exchanges of that era, about \$2,800. Usually, when there were large funds on hand, he took them home with him for safety; he had the typical middle-class Frenchman's preference for keeping money close to his person. But this happened to be a Friday, and Friday was Gouffé's Night Out. He had a private appointment for eight o'clock, one at which he thought it would be inadvisable to carry too much cash. Poor Gouffé, prudent in little and imprudent in much, his name chimes appropriately with a modern slang. As he goes round the corner to his favorite house of call, the Café Gutenberg on the Boulevard Poissonnière, let us consider him a moment.

It is only a few steps from the Gutenberg to his home in the rue Rougemont; it would be wiser if he were there. Long a widower, his two grown-up daughters keep house for him and are careful to remove the soup-stains from his reputable frock coat. Apparently he leads the or-

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derly life expected of a responsible official who handles large sums of other people's money. He returns home regularly for lunch and dinner. But beneath these methodical appearances, Bataille remarks, he dissimulates an existence of agitation. Particularly he has two habits without which this story would not have been written. Too often, after a *petit verre* at the Gutenberg, he frankly exhibits the large bundles of money he is carrying. And those Friday nights, his evenings of escapade, are not always innocent. Pathetic Gouffé: in the dull and busy life of a minor functioneer he is aware of the twinge of irredeemable Time. He is prosperous in his small way; he has a gold watch, and a ring with two good diamonds in it. But he feels vaguely how much he has missed. There are other things in life besides a cocked hat and a portfolio full of Due and Payable. There are a lot of letters in his desk, afterward carefully destroyed by his brother-in-law, which show how he had tried to step-up the low voltage of romance in bailiffing. And when, on the leather settee at the Gutenberg, he replies to a *petit commerçant's* inquiry "How are collections?" to wave a bundle of banknotes gives him the flush of self-importance that all men need now and then. Especially on those bachelor Fridays he enjoys meeting chance convives. He has rather an eye for young women. There is one, a lively little blonde with an impudent tilt to her small nose, who has accepted a drink from him several times. She was introduced as Gabrielle Bompard, or possibly as Mlle Labordère, but he calls her La Petite. He usually sees her with a certain burly talkative Eyraud, a dark and rather forceful fellow, who seems to have travelled

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much and has ideas about all sorts of businesses. Eyraud is twice La Petite's age, and they both look a bit shabby; Gouffé has not yet seen Eyraud pay for a drink; but he can't help admiring the Parisian chic with which La Petite makes the most of her meagre wardrobe. In spite of her schoolgirl mien (she isn't much over twenty) she has a free and startling tongue. Gouffé has even been rather pleasantly scandalized by some of her anecdotes of a Belgian convent-school from which she was expelled. Her father was an iron-merchant in Lille, but after her mother's death he had been infatuated by a governess. Gabrielle ran away to Paris to look for a job. She saw an advertisement of a business called Fribourg which needed a cashier. In that office she met Eyraud; she accepted him instead of the job. They had lately been on a business trip to London together, and kept Gouffé laughing at their account of the oddities of the English. Evidently La Petite hasn't inherited any cold iron in her own disposition, old Gouffé thinks. He was never more mistaken.

Such was the background of the bailiff's thought this evening as he strolled in the sunset of the boulevards. That very day at noon, as he was on his way home for lunch, he had met Gabrielle on the street. She seemed in some distress; told him she had left Eyraud, who was getting to be a bore. She had taken a little apartment of her own in the rue Tronson-Ducoudray, a tiny byway between the Madeleine and the Gare St. Lazare. This was Friday, Gouffé remembered, as he was admiring a mischief in her eye. Why shouldn't she take dinner with him? No, she couldn't do that, but she *would* like

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a chance to consult him about her problems; she would be at home at eight o'clock. I'll be there, he said. So now we see him, after an early dinner, strolling pleasantly and in sentimental anticipation, limping very slightly on his left heel as was his habit. The cocked hat of office (if huissiers wear cocked hats, I don't guarantee this) is laid aside for a new Panama, bought from a hatter who keeps careful measurements of all his steady customers. He has thriftily reckoned how much Gabrielle's problems are likely to cost him. In his pocket is a gold hundred-franc piece and a fifty-franc note. I can't help thinking that in his romantic mood he had mentally designated the gold piece for La Petite. He is wearing his tortoise shell pince-nez, he pauses in the quiet Place de la Madeleine, looks at his watch and strokes his glossy beard. It is a comfortable thought for a bailiff of fifty that a young *poule* (so he thinks of her) should find him so cheery. A few minutes after eight (let us not seem too eager) he is in the rue Tronson-Ducoudray. In the soft air of July the little street is lively, children playing, people chatting in doorways. Windows are open, everyone enjoying the summer dusk. Gouffé taps at a ground floor apartment at the rear of the house. La Petite opens.

"Tiens!" he says. "Tu as là un joli petit nid."

It is small indeed. Apparently there is only one room, and a curtained alcove for sleeping. But he is touched by her simple preparations for hospitality. On a table are champagne, cognac, and biscuits, also pen and ink. On the mantel, undoubtedly, some of the cheap novels of which she was always a constant reader. A comfortable chaise-longue is drawn up close to the

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curtain which modestly conceals her bedchamber. There is no other chair, but he rather likes her intuition that among friends one will serve. She's wearing a kimono with a pretty rope-girdle of twisted red and white silk.

"Will you have some wine?" she says.

"No, thanks, I've just had dinner. Come, sit down and tell me all about it."

He takes the chaise-longue, and with the prettiest confidence she occupies his lap. How small and slender she is. And what an attractive kimono. He admires the heavy silk girdle.

"C'est gentil," he says.

"N'est-ce pas?" She slips it off and laughingly puts it round his neck. "Comme ça te ferait une belle cravate."

The following afternoon the servants of the Hôtel de Toulouse at Lyon were distressed by a trunk that had to be carried upstairs, so heavy that it took three to handle it. But the couple to whom it belonged insisted on having it in their bedroom. When the porter grumbled at the weight, Monsieur explained that it contained samples of cloth. It was a new trunk but had evidently been reinforced for greater strength. The visitors slept soundly that night with their baggage close to the bed. But the next morning, Sunday, the young woman was grieved to see small moistures oozing from the trunk. As a reader of melodramatic fiction it is odd to think that on a recent visit to London she may well have seen on the bookstalls a copy of the then popular *New Arabian Nights* in which the young American, left alone

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with a similar piece of luggage, "nosed all the cracks with the most passionate attention." She wiped the box carefully with her handkerchief, and remarked to her companion that something must be done; particularly in this hot weather.

It was Sunday, the day for excursions. What more natural than to hire a carriage and go for a drive in the country? True, it seemed a little eccentric to take the samples of cloth with them, but Monsieur explained that they were looking for villégiature and would not return to the hotel. He obtained a rig from a livery stable, the trunk was hoisted in, not without further comment from the porter. Monsieur was a hardy fellow, but he was perspiring with nervousness when they finally drove off. When he wiped his forehead he discovered he was wearing a hat which did not belong to him. "Bêtise!" he exclaimed, "I must have left mine at the rue Tronson-Ducoudray." Mistakes like that are bad for the neck.

I do not know the neighborhood of Lyon, but there must be some beautiful drives along the Rhone, and in July 1889 they were not crowded with motor cars. On a wooded hillside near the village of Millery the excursionists halted and took a good look round. They opened the trunk, and with some difficulty dumped out a sinister-looking sack. They dropped the key of the trunk in the road, but they had matters more urgent to think of. They rolled the stiffened bundle down the steep embankment, and were even somewhat gruesomely amused to see how it somersaulted over a bump. Probably they hoped it would fall into the river, but it

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caught in some bushes far down the slope. But they were so relieved to get rid of it on any terms that they drove on encouraged. Behind some brambles a few miles farther on the trunk was thrown into a ditch. In the village of Saint-Genis-Laval a "débitante" (which our Beginners' French Class must not confuse with a *débutante*) served them some refreshments. Long afterward she still remembered the cheerful spirits of the pair. However, they seem to have still felt the need of some purgation. The record is not explicit, but Bataille tells us that they now made an excursion "to a place of pilgrimage." On the first of August they were in Marseilles, where they dropped some clothes and shoes into the water.

Marseilles was evidently a strategic place to be. Monsieur had there both a brother and a brother-in-law. There is no record as to these kinsmen's comments when the visitor and his young woman arrived. The trip may have been explained as a vacation jaunt, but the care with which Monsieur read the newspapers may have caused comment. At any rate, the travellers managed to borrow some money. Monsieur got 500 francs from his brother, and it is surely a tribute to the girl's personality that she cajoled 2,000 francs from the brother-in-law. These increments were celebrated by taking to a jeweler a ring with two diamonds; she had the stones mounted in a pair of handsome ear-pendants.

It seems that they had long had a hankering for what the French love to call the New World. Monsieur had told his amie lively stories of adventures in Mexico and the Argentine. Now events happened that stimulated that desire. On August 13th a laborer working on the

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embankment near Millery was attracted—or rather repelled—by an unpleasant whiff in the warm noonday air. Exploring, he discovered a grisly sack. The contents were past recognition, and further deteriorated by the careless use of a pitchfork with which he removed the covering. He was too agitated to remember, afterward, whether the remains had lain in the sack head-down or head-up; a point very important to the lawyers later on, though irrelevant to the unfortunate contents. And on August 15th the trunk was found.

## II

### “BAGAGE ACCOMPAGNÉ”

THE label of the P. L. M. Railway, affixed to the trunk, showed that its journey had been “effectuated” (delightful to greet again our old friend M. Chaix’s constant phrase) as *Bagage Accompagné* from Paris on July 27. The condition of the trunk immediately suggested some connection with the unknown corpse. On the road, above the embankment, a small key was discovered; it fitted the lock of the trunk. The Paris police now began to get busy, for this obviously might have some bearing on a disappearance that had been bothering them in the capital. By August 17 the Marseilles newspapers were full of the story.

It was time to be moving. The pair returned to Paris on August 18th. With great coolness the girl went straight to the rue Tronson-Ducoudray to retrieve the forgotten hat. Then to London, a city familiar to them. They tarried there long enough for her to have her hair cut off and provide herself with boy’s clothes. They sailed from Liverpool to New York, where she resumed her sex, passing as her companion’s daughter. From New York, following French instinct, they went north to Quebec where they arrived September 7. As far as anyone could humanly predict,

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they had got clear away from whatever it might be that was troubling them.

If this unpleasant narrative has any hero, it can only be Dr. Lacassagne of Lyon who examined the gruesome remains found on the Rhone embankment. Decomposition was too far advanced for any outward recognition, but the expert proceeded, as our much-admired Dr. Thorndyke would have done, to study the skeleton. He noted an “atrophy” in the bones of the left heel, traces of gout in the right foot, and an old water-on-the knee in the right leg. These coincided with information given by the family of the man missing in Paris. There were certain peculiarities about the teeth. Identification began to seem probable. The hatter who kept records of his customers’ head-measurements produced his files, and these also tallied. The bailiff’s daughters in the rue Rougemont were startled when an agent of the Sûreté called to ask for their father’s comb and hairbrush. The comparison of hairs left in the comb with those on the skull in the mortuary at Lyon brought final certainty. The victim was our easy-going Gouffé, whom we last saw admiring a red and white silk girdle.

The delay in identification had made the task of the police sufficiently difficult; now the investigation was further confused by a half-crazed cab-driver in Lyon who, apparently for the sake of notoriety, told a cock-and-bull story about his having transported the famous trunk. It proved to be mere fantasy, but by the time this invention had been exploded the trail was cold. But suspicion pointed plainly toward those who were accustomed to see the huissier waving money at his favorite brasserie. A friend of Gouffé called Rémi

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Launée, a pallid person with a waxed blond mustache and an uncertain eye, was discovered in a strange state of nerves. A detective who called on him unexpectedly found him in the act of trying on a wig at the mirror. There was also a queer thing that happened the night of Gouffé's disappearance. About nine o'clock the concierge on the rue Montmartre heard someone moving about in Gouffé's office. Thinking it was the bailiff himself who had returned, he went to speak to him; but a man burst out of the room, rushed past him on the stairs, shielding his face, and fled away. Going into the office, the concierge found the safe undisturbed, but the desk had been ransacked and the floor was littered with burnt matches. Was Launée this mysterious visitor? But Launée was able to prove a credible alibi, and the searchlight turned upon Eyraud. The latter was known to be in various kinds of trouble, and Launée's anxiety was due to the fact that it was he who had introduced Eyraud to Gouffé, and had given Eyraud the notion that the bailiff was a man of substance. Launée admitted that he and Eyraud had dined together at the *Taverne de Londres* on the evening of July 25, when Eyraud asked a great many pointed questions about Gouffé and his habits. Now Eyraud had disappeared, and his doxy with him. He had cajoled 500 francs from his wife on the morning of July 27, said he was leaving on an important business trip, and hadn't been seen since. By the time these facts had been painfully collated, Eyraud and Gabrielle were off to Canada. We leave them making their way from Quebec to Vancouver in September, 1889. The details of that long journey must remain one of the world's

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many untold stories. By what shifts did they get money for their fares? The gamine of the Parisian boulevards, what did she think of the Rockies in their autumn colors? Probably it occurred to her that for a winter in Canada she would need some warmer clothing. But we must fill in a little more background.

Michel Eyraud had had a lively career. Born about 1842, he served as corporal with the French invasion in Mexico in 1863. He was said to have deserted under fire, but he claimed to have left the campfire for the tenderer light of a Mexican señorita's eyes. He was too gallant, he claimed, to make war on a nation that had such beautiful women; he was always “grand amateur de jupons.” Returned to France, he married a wealthy woman who brought him a dowry of \$8,000, which he rapidly squandered. He was a clever linguist and travelled in the South Americas for an English firm. He was a captain of militia during the siege of Paris. After the Franco-Prussian war he became a distiller of cognac at Sèvres, but apparently he relished his own products too much. The business failed with a resounding crash and liabilities of nearly half a million francs. Toward the end of 1888 we find him acting as manager for a business house in Paris. It was then that he met Gabrielle. By her account, she answered an advertisement for a position; according to Eyraud, she gave him the eye on the street. Either way, it was unlucky for them both. When the judge expressed a virtuous disgust at her having become the mistress of this unsavory swindler, old enough to be her father, Gabrielle's reply was simple. “La misère fait faire bien des choses.”

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Bataille makes no attempt to sentimentalize Gabrielle. He does not find her as pretty as the newspapers had described, though he admits her chic. When he saw her at the trial (December, 1890) she was wearing a fur cap, a dotted veil, a winter cloak "coquet-tishly épaulé," and "gloves with four buttons." (The fur cap, I venture, was a souvenir of the trip to Canada.) Her hair was freshly waved. He calls her a Sainte-Nitouche, viz., a demure hypocrite, but subject to fits of temper. Angered by the prosecution, she would sulk like a scolded child and turn her back on the court. She had been recalcitrant from earliest childhood. Bataille maintains that her intimacy with Eyraud brought her to a state of "complete cynicism." Poor gamine! It was her father's amour with the governess that had sent her out to hunt her fortune. There was odd irony in that, for perhaps a good governess a few years earlier might have made much difference. Her liaison with Eyraud caused much amazement among the learned jurists; so much so that a theory of hypnotic influence was later advanced to account for it. At any rate it was complete. When his various stratagems were rapidly boomeranging, she shared with him the proceeds of her own personal merchandise. But even among daughters of the game her recklessly pungent language scandalized the madams.

In July 1889 Eyraud's situation was serious; in the euphemism of one of the lawyers he was "reduced to expedients." Threatened with a prosecution for fraud, he went to London to think things over. They had resolved upon a little high-class blackmail to recoup the exchequer. On July 7 Gabrielle joined him there; it

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was her first view of perfidious Albion, I should love to know her impressions. They had not yet chosen a victim for their plot, but Gabrielle claimed to have a rich prospect who had promised her large sums If, As, and When. But their preparations for the simple art of blackmail were curiously intricate. It was all, as Eyraud afterward explained, in case of accidents. At a shop which the testimony calls “Peters and Robinson” (I take it to be Peter Robinson’s) Gabrielle bought a rope girdle of red and white silk, a very strong one. In that fatal twist of white and scarlet perhaps the symbolist may see some emblem of the story. Eyraud meanwhile provided himself with a false beard, twelve feet of rope, and a block and tackle. In London they also bought the trunk which became famous. I see them, in some dingy lodging (probably near the British Museum?) looking over their purchases. Gabrielle says that the trunk was intended for her clothes, but the relentless Bataille insists that at that time she had only one dress to her back.

The revenues of the cross-Channel services that month must have shown some small but reckonable improvement by the migrations of this uneasy pair. Gabrielle celebrated Bastille Day (July 14) by crossing to Paris alone with the ominous trunk, but on July 17 she rejoined Eyraud in London. On Saturday, July 20, they returned to France together. Undoubtedly they agreed that they could not endure another London Sunday. Neither perfidious Albion nor temperamental Marianne paid any attention to these inconspicuous travellers. Queen Victoria and Mr. Gladstone were figuring out how the Prince of Wales might be allowed a

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larger stipend, and Lord Salisbury's government was making preparation to receive a state visit from a young sovereign who had lately become Kaiser. In Paris the approaching trial of General Boulanger was the scandal of the moment. Beneath these effective smoke-screens the adventurers continued their cold-blooded plan.

On July 21 they went together to the department store poetically named *Pygmalion* (I seem to remember that it still exists?) to choose some canvas. Their purpose, however, was the exact opposite of the classic myth. They bought 7 meters of sail-cloth, which Gabrielle took to a hotel-room in the rue Prony (near the Parc Monceau). A chambermaid saw her there with the material spread on the bed, sewing it into a sack. Eyraud took the trunk to a luggage-maker and had it reinforced; at a hardware shop he bought a large hook and a swivel. On July 24 Gabrielle, under the name of Mlle Labordère, rented the apartment at 3 rue Tronson-Ducoudray and paid 150 francs in advance. The plant account of the enterprise was mounting.

But now all was ready except the choice of a victim. Perhaps the opulent suitor of whom Gabrielle had spoken was out of town for a long week-end. If so, it was the luckiest exodus of his life. The session with Launée at the Taverne de Londres decided the matter. Gouffé was rich; he would do. When the bailiff met La Petite on the pavement near his office that Friday noon it was not romantic chance. She was patrolling for him.

That afternoon was spent in preparations. In true

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detective stories there are usually some uncertainties, and I may not be too positive about Eyraud's alleged literary compositions. Aided by Gabrielle's memories of feuilleton fiction, he drew up numerous drafts of a letter—intended to be signed by the victim—that Gouffé had been kidnapped and would be held under duress until his family delivered funds for ransom. But the more the author struggled with these simple declarative statements the less credible they seemed. He proceeded to more practical arrangements. We can almost say that Gouffé was murdered because homicide was easier than prose composition.

The archway of the sleeping alcove was surmounted by a large beam. To this he fastened the hook; not an easy job, reaching upward from a chair; it must be done without any hammering which would arouse the anxieties of the patronne. So they were on their guard; if the landlady had come in she might have thought it a pleasant domestic scene; a little ménage à deux installing itself, Gabrielle holding the chair while Eyraud adjusted the drapes across the alcove. From the hook he hung the block and tackle, concealed behind the curtain. The loose end of the rope hung down on this side of the curtain, and Gabrielle ingeniously wrapped it in a strip of dark cloth so it was not noticeable. To the end of the rope they attached a snap-swivel which hung just below the back of the chaise-longue. The other chair was placed behind the curtain, beneath the pulley.

By six o'clock all was ready. They went out and dined with appetite at a little café just behind the Madeleine. It renews one's sense of improbability to think of them sitting on that quiet pavement where

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many of us have eaten and drunk peacefully on summer evenings. The Swiss waiter remembered later that Gabrielle took champagne and seemed in gay spirits. Eyraud was more pensive: his mind was occupied with the mechanics of pulleys; with his fingernails he sketched on the tablecloth a plan of his arrangement of forces.

It was a pleasant time for lingering at table, but by 7:30 they were back at the apartment. Eyraud tested his mechanism once more. They closed the blinds, and Gabrielle put on her kimono and practised the slip-knot in the red and white girdle. Eyraud took his position on the chair behind the curtain. The next half hour seemed very long. Cheerful Parisian babble came from the street outside. I still find the scene hard to realize. It is only just to say that their subsequent accounts of what happened in that room were at variance. I tell it here as Bataille believed it to have occurred. If the pause had lasted much longer they might have begun to disbelieve the scene themselves. Then came the bailiff's tread in the hall.

### III

#### FOREIGN AFFAIRS

*C*OMME ça te ferait une belle cravate . . . As she said this, the anticipative bailiff was intent on an embrace, and she slipped the silk noose round his neck. Eyraud, alert behind the curtain, heard the little click of the swivel and hauled on the rope for all he was worth. That metallic snap, the creak of the hemp, the clatter of the falling chair as Eyraud sprang to his feet, were the last things poor Gouffé heard on this earth. The looped girdle, the hook, the pulley, all worked perfectly.

Eyraud had not foreseen anything on which to belay his murderous halliard. He began to fasten it to the leg of the bed, but it slipped, the body came down heavily. They listened terrified for sounds of alarm. All was quiet. The heavy body did not stir. They began to go through Gouffé's pockets. Then, to Gabrielle's horror, those staring eyes seemed to move. "Achève-le!" she whispered. ("Finish him.") And, as Eyraud remarked calmly afterward, "Nous l'avons rependu." ("We hung him again.")

I do not linger on this episode, of which Bataille gives some uncomely details. In the bailiff's clothes they found only a bunch of keys and 150 francs—just enough to pay for the advance rent on the apartment. Eyraud took the keys and rushed wildly off to Gouffé's

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office. Even to his muddy brain the brutish senselessness of the tragedy must have become apparent. While rummaging Gouffé's desk by the light of burning matches, he heard the concierge coming and fled out again without attempting the safe. Back at the apartment he guzzled some cognac. Then they cut off the victim's clothes with a pair of scissors and slid him into the sack. Mr. A. P. Herbert in his admirable tale *The House by the River* has pointed out that putting a dead body into a sack is not as easy as it sounds. But apparently with his pulley arrangement Eyraud managed it efficiently. Gabrielle's comment on her companion's skill is worth record. "Like putting on a glove. You'd have thought he'd been doing nothing else all his life." They doubled the body into the trunk. Eyraud went to a hotel and "slept like lead." Gabrielle, not less hardy, slept with the trunk at the foot of the bed.

The clear air of Vancouver gives us a pleasant change from the sultry topic of the corpse in the trunk. The topography of that beautiful city I know only by a postcard once sent me, on which I note a comfortable-looking old-fashioned building called the Hotel Angelus. Did it exist in 1889? My postcard photograph shows only the rear of the house, but I can see some sunny bedrooms with lace curtains neatly looped back in the windows. Perhaps it was there that Eyraud and Gabrielle halted after their long journey. At any rate, they stopped somewhere in Vancouver, and registered as M. Vanaert and his daughter Bertha.

At that moment there was in Vancouver a travelling Frenchman—"voyageur un peu naïf" Bataille calls him

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—who had lately returned from the French colonies in Tonkin. We may assume that he was a little homesick for Paris. He met these other compatriots, perhaps in the lounge of the Angelus, and was particularly attracted by the spirited Mlle Vanaert. The Vanaerts found this M. Garanger a man of unusual interest. He held some official commission from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and also appeared to have private resources; he had a prosperous bearing. In fact, says Bataille, he looked more like a vermouth salesman than a diplomatic agent. This is our chance to know what a vermouth salesman looks like. Bataille's description mentions a stocky build, thick neck and shoulders, and a jovial manner; a sanguine complexion and a neatly pointed red beard. The three got along together excellently, and I presume that the Vanaerts tactfully concealed the fact that they were economizing by using only one room.

Perhaps it was the resemblance to a vermouth salesman that attracted M. Vanaert, the former distiller. For the acquaintance thus begun in Vancouver ripened into ideas of a business partnership. M. Garanger, more and more enchanted by the vivacious Bertha, began to think seriously of her sire's proposals that they should set up in the cognac trade, which Vanaert evidently knew to the dregs. California was a land of grapes; why should not Garanger and Vanaert become the Hennessys of the Golden West? M. Vanaert had noticed already at many bars that the Western taste in liquors needed education. The name *Garanger and Vanaert* would look well on a label; why should not a native brandy, distilled with French art from the wines

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of California, be a lucrative traffic among Native Sons? It occurred to Garanger, as Bertha smiled upon his tales of Tonkin, that even if the price of her better acquaintance was financing the father, might it not be worth while? In her enigmatic hazel-green eyes, in her mischievous Parisian argot, he found something from which he had been long and far separated, and for which there was no substitute among the semi-Chinese of Tonkin. As he sat writing his reports for the Foreign Ministry the image of Bertha began to rise between him and the page.

We find the trio reunited in San Francisco a little later; perhaps M. Garanger went there on his Foreign Affairs business, or perhaps he fled there in a last impulse of caution; anyway the Vanaerts followed. By this time Eyraud had chosen the sanguine diplomatist as the most available meal-ticket. And in Gabrielle's quick mind schemes of her own were crystallizing. Eyraud was not only brutal and violent; that she might have condoned, even though he had once gagged her and threatened chloroform; but he was degenerating into a seedy swindler, even trailed in the street by a San Francisco trull who said he owed her \$10.

It is interesting to consider that they arrived in San Francisco just about the same time as a more famous traveller, Mr. Rudyard Kipling. In *From Sea to Sea* Kipling described the lobby of the famous Palace Hotel in 1889: "In a vast marble-paved hall under the glare of an electric light sat forty or fifty men; and for their use and amusement were provided spittoons of infinite capacity and generous gape." I like to imagine that

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in that same hall the desiderating distiller, steering his red-bearded diplomat to the bar and looking warily about for possible game to cozen, may have passed a small young man with spectacles and heavy eyebrows and concluded that he looked too shrewd. Among the many stories then moving in the Anglo-Indian reporter's mind there can hardly have been one more curious than the odyssey of these expatriated French. Their favorite parlor game was putting Gabrielle into a trance by hypnotic gestures. She was so apt a subject that even Garanger could do it. This gave the diplomat a rare sense of spiritual power. Whether all her trances were genuine, or whether she pretended to succumb to Garanger as a wily mode of stimulating his ardor, is a fair choice of guesses. With pleasure I visualize the man of Foreign Affairs, his ruddy face blanched a little with excitement, the red beard sparkling, as he contemplated his psychic prowess—and the appealing relaxation of our lithe gamine in the posture of swoon. So he was enmeshed in affairs even more Foreign than the republic had sent him to consider in Tonkin.

Vanaert *père* was down to small change when he cajoled a thousand dollars from Garanger as the first installment of capital to establish the cognac business. Five thousand more would be necessary, he estimated. to make a go of it, but with the thousand he could pick up valuable second-hand equipment. But it was not among Bertha Vanaert's notions to stand by while Papa completed the plunder. It is easy to imagine the scene in which she appealed to the chivalry of the genial diplomat. "I'm so terrified of Papa, he is cruel, he beats me. Sometimes I fear he is not even honest. I'm

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distracted, what can I do, so far from home? Oh, forgive me, but I have no one to confide in. . . .”

“Poor littlest,” cries the man of Foreign Affairs. “Fly with me, darling Bertha.”

She did; she did indeed. They skipped, and the hopeful parent, returning from a bicker for boilers and vats and the other vessels necessary for a California Hennessy, found them gone. M. Garanger and Bertha, very happy together, retraced the lonely route across Canada in the cold snows and warm hearts of the Christmas season. And I know of no prettier episode in fact or fancy than that they broke the journey for a sentimental visit to Niagara Falls. That took the place of a marriage ceremony. The frustrated distiller spent an angry Yule at the free lunch counters.

Bertha had a superb sense of drama. Her dangerous secret may have approached the tip of her tongue in the thrilling moment when they stood watching the frozen masses of Niagara; or when her patron bought her a warm overcoat for the steamer voyage; but she had the sense to hold it back until the perfect moment. She knew well, no one better, that she had no permanent stake in the diplomatic service. They reached Paris on January 22. She went out to a newsdealer and bought a file of back numbers of the *Petit Journal* containing the story of the murder of Gouffé. Garanger, not as young as he had been, liked to take his morning coffee abed. (“He had once been a stout fellow, but his peregrinations across the world had prematurely fatigued him” is Bataille’s pleasant phrase.) As he luxuriated in the sense of being in Paris at last, and sat up for coffee and the morning news, Bertha sprang her

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mine. She handed him a pile of the *Petit Journal*. "Read those," she said. "I am Gabrielle Bompard."

He refused to believe it. "Mais tu es toquée," he exclaimed; "you're cracked." To which she announced, as she put on the new coat and the little fur cap, "I'm on my way to the Prefect of Police to confess."

Poor Garanger! I find him the most agreeable person in the story. Very likely, in the long and tiresome researches into the commerce and politics of Tonkin, he had nourished some secret hope of promotion; of even being some day Monsieur le Ministre des Affaires Etrangères. Now, after so many adventures and a pleasant voyage, he came gaily back to Paris to make his report. He would keep his petite maîtresse discreetly in the background, and be complimented for his workmanlike study of the rice yield. He sees himself plunged neck and crop into a front-page scandal. He has been gulled and ruined. He will remain forever a minister without portfolio. We leave him there in bed in some obscure Paris hotel, the coffee overturned, copies of the *Petit Journal* all round him, the red beard bristling.

The psychologist must ask, why did Gabrielle confess? Apparently all traces of the crime were covered. It was certainly not any remorse or tenderness of conscience. I think she was genuinely terrified by Eyraud's moods of insane violence, and realized that life with him was bound to result in eventual disaster. By getting back to Paris first, and putting her story on record, she might make it appear that she had been only an unwilling witness, not a participant. Such is Bataille's surmise;

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but he insists that she was equally guilty in the sordid crime.

Eyraud's behavior, when Gabrielle escaped with Garanger, leads us to the necessary conclusion that he really loved his gamine. If he had swallowed chagrin and kept quiet he might well have remained undiscovered. But his conduct was that of a man crazed with rage. He pursued the pair across the continent and hunted for them wildly in Montreal and New York. A curious detail which Bataille adds is that to avert suspicion from himself in these cities, Eyraud wore a Turkish costume which he had stolen. My own interest in the narrative was first aroused by the fact that in the spring of 1890—a year in which I feel a personal interest—the miserable desperado was hanging about Broad Street Station, Philadelphia, watching the passengers for a glimpse of the vanished Gabrielle. Surely, among the earnest young pioneers of Bryn Mawr then commuting into that famous terminal, there cannot have been many who might be mistaken for her.

When he learned that Gabrielle had reached France and confessed, Eyraud wrote wild denunciations of her to the Paris police. He made his way to Havana, where he even had the effrontery to write a newspaper article on the Gouffé murder, pretending, as an amateur detective, to have solved the crime. But he had tempted his luck too far. He was recognized, at the door of a bawdy house, by one of his former employees in the Sèvres cognac business. He was arrested. He tried to commit suicide by opening his veins with the broken lenses of a pair of spectacles, but by the end of June 1890 he was behind bars in Paris.

## IV

### LE COUTEAU TOMBE

IN THE dark days just before Christmas 1890, Michel Eyraud and Gabrielle Bompard came to trial. The court was crowded, but Bataille, always a stickler for the refinements of melodrama, reports that the spectators were not particularly of the *haut monde*. There were not very many notables, he says, though he remarks the presence of several members of the diplomatic corps; come perhaps to ponder the grievances of their indiscreet colleague M. Garanger. For the sensation-curious public one strong element of interest was the much-bruited issue of hypnotism, then in current drawing-room fashion.

There was from the outset little doubt as to Eyraud's fate. He had somewhat the bearing of a gambler who knows he has lost and must pay; his chief preoccupation seemed to be to defend his reputation as a one-time distiller of good cognac. The question was raised, but not settled, whether Gouffé's body was head-up or head-down in the sack; the point being that if the body was head-down then it could hardly have been lowered into the bag by block and tackle, as Eyraud maintained. In this discussion the sack itself was exhibited; whereupon, Bataille bluntly reports, "a cadaveric odor spread

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throughout the courtroom." The session had to be suspended while the room was aired.

Gabrielle's fight for life was of course the drama of the affair. Her defence introduced medical testimony too complicated to examine in detail here. She began the trial in strong combative spirit, retorting smartly to cross-examination, insisting that Eyraud strangled Gouffé with his own hands and that the impromptu gibbet had never been used. But by the second day the ordeal was too much for her nerves. While M. Garanger was on the stand, and the details of her flight with the man of Foreign Affairs were being probed, she screamed and fainted in hysteria and had to be carried out by a guard. This caused a painful impression among the seats reserved for the diplomatic corps, and it was more evident than ever that the unfortunate Garanger's usefulness at the Foreign Office was over. The third day of the trial (December 17, 1890) offers a picture worth preserving. Bataille writes:

*With the snow falling outside, the court is plunged in almost complete darkness. The lights had to be lit at noon. The unlucky journalists, herded in their narrow pew, fraternally pass candle-ends to each other, sticking them in the ink-wells. These rows of wavering lights give the press-bench the appearance of a small chapel. In this uncertain light Gabrielle Bompard's face shows pale tones that would delight a painter. She is now entirely inert and seems in a state of collapse. From time to time her hand nervously clenches her handkerchief, then she returns into immobility, while Eyraud is quite calm rummaging through his masses of memoranda.*

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In this gloomy and tremulous light we have to imagine the packed courtroom rippled with those tense or relieved emotions which the reporter records as "mouvements divers," "sourires," "hilarité," "sensation prolongée"; we hear the clear and Latin logic of the French attorneys, their sharp voices shading masterfully through all the nuances of their art; we see on the table of exhibits those foolish and sinister properties with which we have grown familiar. There are Eyraud's rope and pulley; the false beard which apparently he did not use; the ill-famed trunk, bound at the corners with yellow leather; a sealed envelope marked *Gouffé's socks, used by Dr. Lacassagne in his identification*. There, as neatly coiled as a tropical viper, is the red and white rope-girdle itself. With perfect coolness Eyraud shows how the slip-knot was contrived.

It was on this third day that the great hypnotism controversy entered the proceedings. The gist of it was to prove whether Gabrielle could be held responsible for her conduct. Dr. Brouardel of Paris says that she is a thoroughly bad girl, naturally vicious and perverted; physically she is imperfectly developed, but exceptionally intelligent and completely answerable for whatever she does. She is not a hysterical type; she does not show the characteristic skin-insensibility of hysterics; on the contrary (and this amuses Bataille) Dr. Brouardel says she is unusually ticklish. Dr. Sacreste of Lille, however, who has known her from childhood, considers her a morbidly suggestible subject. At her father's request he had hypnotized her as a young girl, in the hope of putting impulses of better behavior into her mind. He had tried by hypnotic

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suggestion to stop her making signals to young men on the street. He admits that this treatment had not been conclusively beneficial. ("Sourires.")

At this point there emerged the surprising fact that Dr. Voisin, the official prison physician, had hypnotized Gabrielle while she was under arrest before the trial; in a state of trance she had made statements said to have a bearing on the murder. Called upon by the prosecution to reveal the nature of these evidences, the prison doctor declined on the plea of professional privilege. The court upheld him, although Gabrielle's attorney was willing to have her hypnotized again in court and questioned about the crime. There was fierce argument on the point of professional decorum in this matter; so much so that the court was in an uproar and the hall had to be cleared. M. Bataille observes that a number of spectators who were standing quite orderly in the rear of the room were hastily run out, while the seats of advantage, where most of the noise came from, were left undisturbed. "Voilà la justice!"

To have the issue of Gabrielle's moral responsibility so fully discussed was plainly a triumph for her counsel. It was bound to create doubt in the minds of the jury. Professor Liégeois of Nancy, leader of the Hypnotism-in-a-Waking-State school of thought, now spoke for four mortal hours on the pathology of ecstasy, hallucination, somnambulism, catalepsy and induced unconsciousness. To the great annoyance of the district attorney he insisted that Gabrielle was a mere automaton under Eyraud's influence. As a matter of fact he had never seen Gabrielle before, and I don't think anyone took Professor Liégeois very seriously. Certainly

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those of us who have grown to feel we know something about Gabrielle do not regard her as under any circumstances an automaton. But there was no way to abridge the learned professor's innumerable anecdotes of hypnosis; he alarmed the court by taking refuge in Article 319, paragraph 3, of the Criminal Code, which "permits a witness to make his deposition without interruption." Professor Liégeois seemed to contend that almost anyone might be put under the hypnotic influence of another, even unawares and in the twinkling of an eye; he told some remarkably sportive case-histories to prove it. To this the prosecution retorted that perhaps the professor himself had been hypnotized by the lawyers of the defence, and had come all the way from Nancy in an unconscious trance of suggestion. M. Bataille, growing weary of all this, concludes that the professor's sleep-inducing powers were indubitable; for during the whole course of his harangue Gabrielle herself slept soundly on the shoulder of a court attendant.

But we draw toward the end. The wrangles on the matter of hypnotism were finally dismissed as irrelevant by both sides. On the fifth day, with a return of strong French realism, the lawyers addressed themselves to concluding the unsavory business; and probably the jury were getting impatient to do their Christmas shopping. The attorney general (M. Quesnay de Beaurepaire) said:

*Pour Gabrielle Bompard, je la remets entre vos mains. Elle a vingt-deux ans. Une fois, c'était au début de ma carrière, il m'est arrivé de requérir la peine de mort contre*

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*une jeune fille de vingt ans. Le jury ne m'a pas suivi, et, le soir, j'en ai été bien heureux.*

The verdict was death for Eyraud, and twenty years Hard Labor for Gabrielle.

Eyraud was executed by guillotine on the Place de la Roquette, February 3, 1891. The last road travelled by that lover of sordid streets was the rue de la Roquette, highway of grim associations from the Bastille to Père Lachaise. From prison he wrote two letters to his wife and daughter which are singularly dignified and affecting. He begged them to forget him and change their name; he made no protestation of innocence. Called at dawn on the last day, he twice refused the brandy they offered him; cognac, his old friend and enemy, could do no more for him now. Perhaps in the soiled strands of red and white twisted in the story there is one flash of clear color. I seem to see it in his words on the way to the scaffold. He spoke of Gabrielle. "Ah, elle est jolie, celle-là."

"Le couteau tombe. C'est fini."

Gabrielle, if still living, finished her travaux forcés long ago—in 1910. Even now (1931) she would be only sixty-two. I wonder if she feels a little queer when she sees a huissier; or remembers Niagara Falls.

GOOD THEATRE

*To Emily Kimbrough*

## CHARACTERS

THE GIRL IN THE BOX OFFICE

FIRST DINNER JACKET

SECOND DINNER JACKET

TWO STRANGERS

*Customers in the lobby, and members of the audience*

## GOOD THEATRE

*The scene is the lobby of a New York theatre while a play is in performance within. At the back, centre, the window of the box office. Right, at a 45-degree angle, the entrance to the auditorium. The left wall, also at a 45-degree slant, is almost concealed by huge posters of the play, pictures of girls in one-piece bathing suits, large photographs of actors, and such announcements as YOUR MONEY OR YOUR WIFE, THIRD HUGE YEAR, THE PLAY THAT MAKES DIMPLES TO CATCH THE TEARS. SEE THE BATHING CHORUS, THE BABIES THAT MADE THE OCEAN FAMOUS. Down left, entrance from street.*

*The director will note that this piece requires a considerable number of backstage voices carefully drilled to emit, at given moments, the sound of a large audience screeching with laughter. This laughter must have a specially proletarian timbre, it is predominantly feminine and subtly suggests the vulgar horseplay of the piece proceeding within. It is always a sudden unanimous explosion, followed by scattered almost hysterical screams of female merriment. The director will see to it, by giving his signals at the proper instant, that this backstage laughter does not interfere with any possible laughter in the actual audience.*

*The box-office window is arranged so that the*

## GOOD THEATRE

*audience can get a clear view of the sprightly young woman in charge of the tickets. At the entrance to the theatre proper, R, are two dark and dapper little men in dinner jackets and velvet hats, very Hart, Schaffner and Marx in aspect, guardians of the doorway; they are almost twinlike in similarity though one is older than the other. Five or six young men and girls are standing L, looking at the posters. Their clothes and umbrellas show that it is raining outside.*

*Immediately after the rise of the curtain there is a terrific and multitudinous yell of laughter from behind the scene. The young people studying the posters look at each other and then move over to the box-office window, where they go through the motions of inquiring for tickets. Two or three other people also come in from the street, shake off rain, and go to the box office.*

GIRL IN BOX OFFICE (*to these inquirers successively*)

All sold out for the next three weeks.

All sold out.

(*Another loud halloo behind*)

I can give you two in the sky for a week from Monday.

Sometimes there's something turned in just before the show.

Sorry, sister, there ain't a thing.

Not a chance.

Positively S. R. O.

(*A supreme explosion of laughter inside, followed by single squawks and yelps. The loiterers in the lobby go out reluctantly.*)

## GOOD THEATRE

1ST DINNER JACKET

That's where she loses her bathin' suit.

*(He looks at his watch)*

Ten thirty-two. Running right on schedule to-night, we'll let out by eleven five.

2ND D. J.

Does everything always come right on time like that?

1ST D. J.

Sure. You can set your watch by the laughs. You'll learn a lot about the show business when you go on the road with that new company. Hoboken to Tallahassee, they'll all yell at the same thing. The next one comes at ten thirty-three when she uses that hank of seaweed for a skirt. They'll laugh for twelve seconds. Time it for yourself.

*(He holds out his watch for younger man to see. A howl of laughter from behind, diminishing and then renewing, lasting exactly twelve seconds. If possible there should be among the backstage voices one that can produce a specially loud, braying, and grotesque masculine yawp, recognizable now and then above the others.)*

2ND D. J.

Pretty good. Not even this storm tonight ain't hurt none.

1ST D. J.

Takes more'n weather to pull this show's punch. Startin' on third year and took twenty-four

## GOOD THEATRE

thousand last week. Some draw, I'll tell the world. With this piece Monday's near as good as Saturday, and any showman'll tell you that's a miracle.

*(Another uproar behind.)*

2ND D. J.

I thought it bein' Hallowe'en might cut into business, so many parties on tonight.

*(During this conversation two men in Elizabethan costumes have entered from the street, shaking rain-drops from their cloaks and plumed hats, and look about them curiously. They examine the posters, confer together, suggest in dumb show that there is something about these that they do not understand, and go to the box-office window. Meanwhile continued explosions of laughter from behind make them look oddly at one another. The two Dinner Jackets, talking together, half turned toward offstage, as though looking into the house, do not notice these visitors until, a moment later, the voice of the girl at the box office catches their attention.)*

*The two visitors, whom we will identify merely as W and F, are very different in demeanor. W, of medium stature, inclined to plumpness, has a high forehead prematurely baldish, auburn hair, bright hazel eyes, a small moustache, and a very tiny beard on his lower lip. He is of mercurial, sensitive, excitable disposition. The other, F, is more controlled; taller and thinner, with dark eyes and the arched brows of a humorist. His handsome face is shrewd, observant, cynical, a trifle*

## GOOD THEATRE

*sombre; he has a drooping moustache and a neat beard.)*

2ND D. J. (*timing another laugh*)

Six seconds for that one.

1ST D. J.

Yeh. That's where she skids on the jellyfish. At matinees that on'y gets four seconds. They always laugh longer at night. Nothing on their minds, I guess. Kids in bed and dish-washing all done for the day.

2ND D. J.

That's the only trouble by this show. So much time out for laughs, always I miss the 11:25 for Cypress Hills.

1ST D. J.

Don't be sore on them laughs, brother. Every one o' them screams is a meal ticket. That's what I call good theayter.

GIRL (*loudly*)

Not a darn thing. What's the use you boys coming round here in fancy dress an' tryin' to kid me?

W (*to F*)

Who is the saucy knave to use us thus? There was a varlet once at the barrier of the Globe spoke me just so. I draggled him in Bankside.

1ST D. J. (*turning*)

Coupla birds from that fancy dress ball at the Astor.

## GOOD THEATRE

GIRL

No, you can't go in without seats. Standing Room's full up. Besides the show's most over, they're in the last act.

W

I'll not stomach it.

GIRL

Don't try to start nothin' round here. Run back to the costumer's and put on your pants.

W

Godamercy, to be groundlinged thus. Ho, young capon, forth and be carved. (*Makes as if to draw his rapier.*)

F (*restraining him*)

Tush, Will, tush. No offence was meant. Besides it is no fire-eater. Seest thou not, tis but a wench?

W

Go to! A wench in the theatre? (*Looks at her closely.*) Zounds,'tis even so. Nay, then, considered as wench she is not ill favored, though uncouth in the poll. (*He refers, need we explain, to her close-cropped hair.*)

GIRL

You boys better get home to New Haven and sleep it off.

W

Nay, duckling, spite me not. What manner

## GOOD THEATRE

of play is this? (*Laughter behind.*) It reapeth public favor?

GIRL

It's a knockout. Mean to say you ain't heard of it?

F

But is it play indeed, play absolute? Once this evening we were shrewdly gulled with accelerated portraits——

GIRL

Come again, Webster. I don't get you.

W

Instead of proper playhouse life and doings  
On a whited arras we saw passage  
Of wild phantasmas and distracted shades  
With trivial texts between. Inexplicable dumb-show!  
A murrain on such cozenage!

GIRL

Oh, sure, it's a real stage play, not a pitcher.—  
Better stick around. I might find you two good seats, about a month from now.

W

Gramercy; this is our only night. We saw your fiery blazons overhead. "Your Money or Your Wife"—the title's merry.

F

The alternative is justly choosed. The more wiving, the less in pocket.

## GOOD THEATRE

GIRL

Yeh, it's a nifty. Gets 'em coming. It ain't nothing to do with the show. Just a line.

W

But what meaneth this bombast touching tears and dimples?

F

A form of hyperbole, I trow; inclining men's minds to credit that the piece assuageth dolor with concurrent risibles, moving simultaneously to grief and merriment.

*(Another yell of laughter inside.)*

W

Merriment, indeed. Lord, Frank, they whooped it just so at the old Globe. I know that voice of the groundlings. I'll warrant some zany hath fallen on his rump.

GIRL

It's a good guess.

W

And your choirboys yonder. *(He points to poster of the bathing beauties.)* A cunning trick of padding. They counterfeit damsels right briskly. 'Tis good for business.

GIRL

*Boys!* Say, what do you think this is? The Columbia varsity show?—Mr. Einstein! Let these guys breathe on *your* neck. I'm busy.

## GOOD THEATRE

F

The wench is something choleric. Accost the little gemini in sable.

*(They make a courteous bow to the two Dinner Jackets.)*

W

Gentles, Godigoden (*which is correct Elizabethan for "God give you good even"*).

1ST D. J.

You *can't* get in. Sorry, gents; full house.

W

A brave night for the author.

F

What have we here; something comicall-tragically-historical-pastoral?

*(Another shout of laughter inside.)*

1ST D. J.

It don't sound tragical-historical, does it? Come on, boys, what's the big idea? You from that party at the Astor?

W

Gossip, we come from far; our inquest's honest.

1ST D. J.

Inquest! No one dead around here.

W

When I was at the Globe——

## GOOD THEATRE

1ST D. J.

The Globe? Oh, friends of Charley Dillingham, maybe. Say, are you professionals? Why didn't you flash a card—

W

We had a hope to learn what new progressions, what simulations and what pretty arts the play-house stages now. Tell us the course and color of your drama.

1ST D. J.

Sure, it's a pleasure. Greatest wallop Broadway ever had. It's got everything, surefire. Comedy, music, dancing—

F

Dancing to song, if sweetly devised, is a thing of great pleasure. It hath an extreme good grace, and maketh sport for the vulgar.

1ST D. J.

You said it. Boy, wait till you see that chorus. Well, it's like this. There's an ornery old bird living on Long Island, that's kinda gypped his brother outa the family property, they had a run-in and the brother went off to Florida, years ago when it was all just a sand beach.

W

Florida?

F

A kind of plantation, perchance—

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1ST D. J.

Oh, filling stations and scenery and one-piece bathing suits. Where folks lay around on the sand and wait for the newspapers to take their picture.

W

A Forest of Arden.

*(He is listening with closest attention.)*

1ST D. J.

So the brother beats it off down there in the sunshine. He gets together a kind of Boy Scout Troop, a bunch of his old buddies that's all cuckoo for the simple life. They camp out in the jungle and sing barber shop harmony and swear it beats Times Square all hollow. And there's a Gloomy Gus along who pulls a swell line of philosophy. He's full o' the heebejeebies but he's one grand wise-cracker.

*(Loud laughter behind.)*

There, that's him now.

F *(to W)*

Nay, there is strange infusion in his discourse. I make but doubtful seizure of his drift.

W *(nudges him)*

Soft, soft! This is of notable purport. ("Purport," in Elizabethan usage, is accented on the second syllable.) *(To D. J.)*—But the wenches, man! Sure your author hath not fobbed you off with a mere parcel of—*(he hesitates for the word)*—wise-crackers—moralizing in the greenwood? What is a play without wenches?

## GOOD THEATRE

1ST D. J.

You should worry. This is Broadway, ain't it? Sure, I'm coming to that. There's a coupla lovely girls, they get fed up living with the rich guy and they run away to Florida, too.

W

Ha! Habited as boys?

1ST D. J.

How'd you know? Yeh, it's a fack, though it don't really make much difference; they're all dressed like boys nowadays. And there's a young fellow, a mechanic that works in a gar-ridge who's fell terrible hard for Rosie—that's one of the girls. He's crazy about her, just worships her, and the poor bimbo can't do nothing but blow up her tires and fill her batt'ry with acid—

F

The scoundrel!

1ST D. J.

Oh, no, just this what they call love at first sight. The girl likes him, too. He's a big athaletic kid and she's seen him do his stuff at a boxing bout they put on for charity. You know how these classy dames falls for that sorta thing.

W

And your lovesick mechanical follows to the Forest of—to Florida?

## GOOD THEATRE

1ST D. J.

You betcha. He opens up a hot dog stand and names it for her, calls it Pretty Rosie's Dog Parlor. He does a big sideline in cold cream, too.

F

Hot dogs, cold cream, a strange antipathy. What is't, a kennel or a dairy?

1ST D. J.

Cold cream for sunburn. Most of those dames down there gets themselves sunburned right up to the horizon. Well, the kid's clever, on trees along the road he hangs signs *Get Your Dogs at Pretty Rosie's*, and *For Sunburned Legs Come to Pretty Rosie's*. When she sees these signs everywhere she thinks it's a queer coincidence.

F

'Tis ever the weakness of playwrights. They are not content till plodding probability leapeth like a flea.

S

This—this dame you mention—she seeks him out, undaunted by his kennel of wild hounds?

1ST D. J.

At first he don't reckonize her in her pants, and she pulls his leg something fierce; it's a riot. Then, of course, the chorus comes on, the whole gang goes in swimming, and say, there's some slick love-making—

## GOOD THEATRE

*(Laughter behind.)*

That's what they're doing now. *(He looks off, as if into the theatre. W approaches the doorway and looks off also, vastly interested.)*

F

For the stage, love is matter of comedies; but in life it doth much mischief.

1ST D. J. *(turning to F)*

Say, your friend's a good showman. He talks like balloon soup, but he knows good theayter.

F

Aye, he hath a practitioner's eye for a love scene.

1ST D. J.

I think he's kidding me. He's seen this show before.

F

'Tis possible—

W *(from doorway, exulting)*

Lord, Frank—Our darling fustian!—Aye, the very thing! *(Continues to gaze entranced, while a great shout of laughter comes from behind.)*

1ST D. J. *(to F)*

Then the real estate boom hits 'em, the old wise-crackers is so busy laying out waterfront lots on mortgage they has no time to picnic in the woods; land values goes to the sky and even Gloomy Gus starts a development. The old

## GOOD THEATRE

fourflusher on Long Island loses his jack in Wall Street an' has to come down to borrow from his brother and say he never meant it. They get him a job as a bellhop at Coral Gables. Just a grand hokum fadeout, and everybody happy.

*(Laughter within. W comes back from doorway radiant.)*

W

Ah, Frank, thou shouldst write plays.

F

Tush, these are but toys.

W

To hear the groundlings roar as they do now,  
Oh noble sport, sport royal!—Thou'rt too nice.  
To my gross Bankside wit, 'tis meat and drink  
To hear the addled citizens at their mirth—  
Their lewd and lackwit innocent noble mirth!

1ST D. J.

Yeh, it's a great show; a great play for the public.

W

I thought so once myself.

1ST D. J.

Would you believe, every critic in town panned it—

F

The intellect of man, then, is not dead.

## GOOD THEATRE

1ST D. J.

Give 'em what they like, as they like it—

F (*to W*)

As *you* like it—

(*Laughter within.*)

W

Nay, Frank, I see thou hast no playhouse heart;  
In this my mystery thou art not capable.  
Why even this hodge-pudding of poor dross  
Brings me my old ecstasies into mind—  
How from the moment of first entrance on  
To strike them with the sense of some suspension,  
Some controverse of passion and desire  
So that without a guess of what's to come  
They feel the onward moving, and are thrilled—

1ST D. J.

Sure! You gotta have suspense—

W

To hold all this within the troubled wit  
And ere a line be characterized, to feel  
In airy storage in the delicate brain  
Your creatures at their doing—  
Not trammelled up with heavy circumstance  
But actual and free—yea, this is godlike!

1ST D. J.

I've got a kid in Bushwick High, she said exactly the same thing. She's only sixteen but

## GOOD THEATRE

she's took a correspondence course in play-writing. Her mother was troup- ing in East Lynne before she was born, I think that gave the kid a sorta litry slant.

(*Laughter behind.*)

W

That uproar hath the proper vulgar note,  
Sweet in the playwright's ear. Your auditors  
Seasoned with mirth and ripe in apprehension  
Then curiously draw your tensions tighter,  
Let glamour tease them on.

1ST D. J.

That's right: get 'em laughing, you can do any-  
thing with 'em.

F

As Tully hath it, *Haec ego non rideo; non sal sed natura ridetur*; which is to say, meseems these cachinnations are not caused by wit but by mere animal heyday. Thou rememberest, Will, all motives of laughing have been anatomized in three: foreigners, bodily prostrations, and strong cheese; thereof the merriment of the third seems most difficult to construe.—Confound not these baubles with thine own heavenly stuff.

W

Then think you that the roister-doister vein  
Requires no cunning? E'en your fustian  
Must be just so; so filed and peized

## GOOD THEATRE

To weigh the voice and carriage of the speech,  
To throw the cranky jape just on the moment,  
Dibble the seedling theme in earthly sconces  
And plant it unawares; and get it over  
To a stamping coughing jostling stinking pit  
Of ragamuffins, grooms, and varletry,  
The cut and longtail of the populace—  
And still have grace for loftier quiddities  
To please the court and gentry—

There's an art,  
Lord Chancellor, that statesmen in great place  
Might study to their profit.

*(Laughter behind.)*

Mark you, the veriest groundling of the lot  
Must see himself, his inward hope or grievance,  
Active on the scene. Aye, this it is  
That makes our stagy antics quick and sheer:  
Lo, on the very instant of their doing  
They are transmuted to the blood and stuff  
Of every hearer; who admires the image  
And hugs it as his own, or fashions it  
To suit his private fancy.

1ST D. J.

It's a fack; we have to keep a cop at the stage  
door to move on the bozos.

W

It is the varsal ego in men's bosoms  
That gives 'em stomach, in their loneliness,  
To chew and savour this our bright pretence  
And take it to themselves.—Haply the author  
Like the matron pelican of adage

## GOOD THEATRE

Feeds his unsuspective auditors  
From the red artery of his proper breast.

F

Bravo, Will! Almost persuadest thou me!  
Thou art, what's passing rare in playwrights,  
nigh as eloquent as thine own creations.

W

My stuff, you say? Fico! A peoplish vein,  
With flashes of proud verse,  
But farced and strumpeted for greasy ground-  
lings.  
Oh halidom, to think what *these* (*gesturing off*)  
could do,  
New fangles and devices for the scene  
And women—female women—on the board  
To play their lovely, elvish, tragic part  
And draw the little nerves of tender feeling  
So tight, so strange. Lord, Lord, what truths  
and triumphs  
Are promised for the workmen in this craft.  
Oh to be actual of it once again—(*a pause*)  
Methinks we still might move a heart or two,  
And not o'ergild the fable.

GIRL (*coming from box office; she has her hat on*)

Mr. Einstein, here's the report on tonight's  
business. Will you OK it please. (*1st D. J.*  
*takes the paper and goes into box office. W is*  
*looking into the theatre. The girl turns to F.*)  
Well, old sport, your friend's got quite a line.  
I been listening in. Gee, he talks like grand  
op'ra.—

## GOOD THEATRE

2ND D. J.

That musta been some party they were on to-night.

GIRL

Where do you sheiks learn all that new slang, up at college? That's a grand crack about the women, female women. Say, I'd like to have that bird meet some o' my girl friends—

F

Nothing, I trow, would give him greater solace. 'Tis our misfortune we have a journey to perform.

GIRL

Back to New Haven, I spose. Well, there's time for a coupla sundaes before the midnight—

W (*coming from doorway; his eye kindles upon her, and I begin to see myself that she has her charms*)  
Ah, sweet chuck; in relenting mood? 'Tis o'er-long since I have seen such brightness in an eye. —Frank, these new tires do not so ill become them. (*He indicates her attractive close-fitting little hat.*) A goodly porringer!—An we held converse together, duckling, deemst thou not we might find topics of good cheer?

GIRL (*who has quite succumbed to this mode of address*)

I'll say so. What you doin' after the show? Do you Charleston?

## GOOD THEATRE

2ND D. J.

Hey, I thought you were dated up with me—

W

We might repair to a tavern—

F

Will, our space is short. On the punctual midnight—

GIRL

Frank, you're an old iceberg. Damn the midnight. There's plenty of trains at Grand Central.

W

I had forgot. 'Tis true, we make a journey—*(chaffing her genially)* a journey that permits no baggages. *(Then almost as if to himself.)* The dead shepherd spoke the seasonable line—poor Kit. *(He quotes.)* "That time might cease, and midnight never come."

GIRL

That's the idea.

W *(takes her arm, looks at her quizzically and tenderly)*

—Sweetheart, I had a gust for frolic once.

Savor thy passing hours; may they be sweet—

*(She leans toward him, meeting him clearly in the eye; it is even suspicionable that a kiss is toward, while F watches in amused tolerance; what the*

## GOOD THEATRE

*2nd D. J. thinks I don't care, he is only a puppet anyhow; but then, after just enough pause, comes a burst of clapping from within.)*

GIRL

That's the curtain. Cheese it, here they come.  
Meet you here in three minutes.

*(She runs off, into the auditorium.)*

W *(looking after her)*

And so, goodnight.

*(A confused sound of movement from behind. W and F stand a moment uncertainly.)*

F

Come, Will. Here we have no part. We are but cuckoos in the nest—

W

Or those thin shadows on the whited screen.  
The word is exit.

*(As they go toward the street, L, drawing their cloaks about them, 1st D. J. bobs out of the box office.)*

1ST D. J.

Well, so long, boys, glad to see you any time you're around.

*(They make a polite salute, and are gone.)*

*(The advance guard of a typical musical comedy audience comes through the doorway, R; the men lighting cigarettes, women adjusting their wraps. They pause to utter comments, which must be very distinctly said and not hurried.)*

## GOOD THEATRE

### MEMBERS OF THE AUDIENCE

A great show.

Certainly was comical.

I thought I'd die laughing.

I could see that all over again.

How d'you suppose they think up them things.

I like it, it was *different*.

It sure was original.

### CURTAIN



KATHLEEN



TO  
THE REAL KATHLEEN  
*With Apologies*



# KATHLEEN

## I

THE Scorpions were to meet at eight o'clock and before that hour Kenneth Forbes had to finish the first chapter of a serial story. The literary society, named in accordance with the grotesque whim of Oxford undergraduates, consisted of eight members, and it was proposed that each one should contribute a chapter. Forbes was of a fertile wit, and he had been nominated the first operator. He had been allowed the whole Christmas vacation to prepare his opening chapter;

which was why on this first Sunday of term while the rest of Merton College was at dinner in hall, he sat at his desk desperately driving his pen across the paper.

Forbes's room in Fellows' Quad was one of those that had housed Queen Henrietta Maria in 1643, and though Forbes's own tastes were nondescript the chamber still had something of an air. The dark wood panelling might well have done honour to a royal lodger, and a motion-picture producer would have coveted it as a background for Mary Pickford. It was unspoiled by pictures: two or three political maps of Europe, sketchily drawn with coloured crayons, were pinned up here and there. The room was a typical Oxford apartment: dark, a little faded, but redeemed

by the grate of glowing coals. Behind the chimney two recessed seats looked out over the college gardens; long red curtains were drawn to shut out the winter draughts. It was the true English January—driving squalls of rain, dampness, and devastating chill. The east wind brought the booming toll from Magdalen tower very distinctly to the ear, closely followed by the tinny chime in Fellows' Quad. It was half past seven.

Forbes laid down his pen, looked quizzically at the last illegible lines slanting up the paper, and realized that he was hungry. His untasted tea and anchovy toast still stood in the fender where the scout had put them three hours before.

He switched on the electric light over

the dining table in the centre of the room, and, dropping on the sofa before the fire, prodded the huge lumps of soft coal into a blaze. The triangular slices of anchovy toast were cold but still very good, and he devoured them with appetite. He lit a cigarette with a sigh of content, and reflected that he had not crossed his name off hall. Therefore he must pay eighteen pence for dinner, even though he had not eaten it. Also there lay somewhat heavily on his mind the fact that at ten the next morning he must read to his tutor an essay on "Danton and Robespierre," an essay as yet unwritten. That would mean a very early rising and an uncomfortable chilly session in the college library, a dismal place in the forenoon. Never mind, first came a jolly evening

with the Scorpions. The meetings were always fun, and this one, coming after the separation of a six-weeks' vacation, promised special sport. Carter was down for a paper on Rabelais; King would have some of his amusing ballades and rondeaus; and above all there would be the first chapter of the serial, from which the members promised themselves much diversion. It was too late now to attempt anything on Danton and Robespierre; he picked up a volume of Belloc and sat cosily by the fire.

A thumping tread sounded on the winding stairs, then the faint clink of a large metal tray laid on the serving table outside, and a muffled knock at the "oak," the thick outer door which Forbes had "sporté" when he came in

at six to write his stint. He unfastened the barrier and admitted Hinton, the scout, who bore in a tray of eatables, ordered by Forbes from the college store-room for the refreshment of his coming guests. Forbes, like most men of modest means, made it a point of honour to entertain lavishly when it was his turn as host, and the display set out by Hinton made an attractive still life under the droplight. A big bowl of apples and oranges stood in the centre; tin boxes from Huntley and Palmer, a couple of large iced cakes, raisins, nuts, and a dish of candied fruits ended the solids. There was also a tray of coffee cups and a huge silver coffee pot bearing the college arms, flanked by a porcelain jug of hot milk. De Reszke cigarettes, whiskey and soda, and a new

tin of John Cotton smoking mixture completed the spread—which would be faithfully reflected in Forbes's "battels," or weekly bills, later on. Young men at Oxford do themselves well, and this was a typical lay-out for an undergraduate evening.

Hinton, a ruddy old man with iron-gray hair and a very red and bulby nose, was a garrulous servant, and after a tentative cough made an attempt at small talk.

"I didn't see you in 'all to-night, sir."

"No," said Forbes, "I had some writing to do, Hinton."

"Oh yes, sir," said Hinton, according to the invariable formula of college servants. A moment later, after another embarrassed cough, he began again.

"Very wet night, sir; they say the

towpath will be under water in another day or so."

Forbes was not a rowing man, and the probable submerging of the towpath was not news that affected him one way or the other. His only reply was to ask the scout to refill the coal-scuttle. For this task Hinton donned an old pair of gloves and carried in several large lumps of coal in his hands from the bin outside. Then he disappeared into the adjoining bedroom to pour out a few gallons of very cold water into Forbes's hip bath, to turn down the sheets, lay out his pajamas, and remove a muddy pair of boots to be cleaned. Such are the customs that make sweet the lives of succeeding undergraduates at Oxford. It is pleasant to know that Palmerston, Pitt,

Gladstone, Asquith—they have all gone through the old routine. Forbes's father had occupied the very same rooms, thirty years before, and very likely old Hinton, then a "scout's boy," had blacked his boots. Certainly Forbes senior had lain in the same bedroom and watched Magdalen Tower through the trees while delaying to get up on chilly mornings.

"Anything else to-night, sir?" said Hinton, as Forbes put down Belloc and began to clean a very crusty briar.

"Nothing to-night."

"Thank you, sir," said Hinton and took his departure, after poking up the fire and removing the dead tea things.

The eight o'clock chimes spoke as Hinton clumped downstairs, and a few moments later Forbes's guests began to

straggle in. All were wet and ruddy from rain and wind, and, as they discarded raincoats and caps, disclosed a pleasant medley of types. The Scorpions was a rather recent and informal society, but it had gathered from various colleges a little band of temperamental congenials who found a unique pleasure in their Sunday evening meetings. None of them was of the acknowledged literary successes of the university: their names were not those seen every week in the undergraduate journals. And yet this obscure group, which had drawn together in a spirit of satire, had in it two or three men of real gift. Forbes himself was a man of uncommon vivacity. Small, stocky, with an unruly thatch of yellow hair and a quaintly wry and homely face, he

hid his shyness and his brilliancy behind a brusque manner. Ostensibly cynical and a witty satirist of his more sentimental fellows, his desk was full of charming ballades and *pièces d'amour*, scratched off at white heat in odd moments. His infinite fund of full-flavoured jest had won him the nickname of Priapus. But beneath the uncouth exterior of the man, behind his careless dress and humorously assumed coarseness, lay the soul of a poet—sensitive as a girl, and devout before the whisperings of Beauty.

Stephen Carter and Randall King were first to arrive, and seized the ends of the fireside couch while Forbes poured their coffee.

"A Clark Russell of an evening!" said Carter, stretching his golfing

brogues to the blaze. "Don't you love a good drenching, downpouring night? I do!" He was a burly full-blooded blond, extravagantly facetious in convivial moments, and a mournful brooder in solitude. King, better known as "The Goblin," was a dark, whimsical elf in thick spectacles, much loved in the 'varsity dramatic society for his brilliant impersonations. The Goblin said nothing as he sipped his coffee and gazed at the fire.

"There you go again, Falstaff!" exclaimed Forbes to Carter, as he unlocked a corner cupboard and drew out a bottle of port. "The universal enthusiast! I believe you'll be enthusiastic about the examiners that plough you!"

"What, Falstaff get ploughed?" said

a vast and rather handsome newcomer, flinging open the door without knocking. "I think he's down for a ruddy First!" This was Douglas Whitney, of Balliol.

Carter's only answer to both these remarks was to drain a glass of the port which Forbes was decanting.

"I say, Priapus, what vile port!" he said. "Is this some of the vintage you crocked poor old Hinton with?"

"Any port in a storm, Falstaff," said the Goblin, mildly.

As Forbes was pouring out the coffee loud shouts of "Minters!" greeted the next arrival. This was Johnny Blair of Tennessee and Trinity, the only American among the Scorpions. Blair was a Rhodes Scholar whose dulcet Southern drawl and quaint modes of speech were a

constant delight to his English comrades. His great popularity in his own college was begun by his introduction of mint julep, which had given him his nickname.

"Hello, Minters!" cried Forbes.  
"What cheer?"

"Large tabling and belly cheer," said Blair, quoting his favourite Elizabethan author.

By the time Forbes had poured out eight cups of coffee and as many glasses of wine, Keith, Graham, and Twiston had come in, making the full gathering. There was much laughing and banter as the men stood round the table or by the fire, lighting pipes and cigarettes, and helping themselves to fruit and cake. Finally, when everyone was settled in a semicircle round the fire, Forbes

hammered his coffee cup with a spoon. According to the custom of the society the host of the evening always acted as chairman.

"The meeting will please come to order," said Forbes. "Brother Scorpions, what is your pleasure? Has the secretary anything to report?"

The gatherings of the Scorpions were pleasingly devoid of formality, and untrammelled by parliamentary conventions. There were no minutes, and the only officer was a secretary who sent out postal cards each week, reminding the members of the time and place of the next meeting.

King, puffing happily at a large pipe, declared that no official business required attention.

"Then I call upon Falstaff for his

delightful paper on Rabelais," said Forbes.

A small electric reading lamp was propped behind Carter's head, and the Scorpions disposed themselves to listen. Carter pulled an untidy manuscript from his pocket, and after an embarrassed cough, began to read.

The general tenor of an undergraduate essay on Rabelais, intended for the intimacy of a fireside circle, may readily be guessed. The general thesis of the composition was of course to prove that Rabelais was by no means the low-minded old dog of Puritan conception; or, as Carter put it, that he was "not simply a George Moore"; but that his amazing writings bore witness throughout to a high and devoted ethical purpose. It is even conjectur-

able that Carter may have said *puribus omnia pura*; but if he did so, it was with so droll an accent that his audience laughed amain. At all events his reading was punctuated with cheery applause, and at the conclusion the Scorpions renewed their acquaintance with those historic affinities whiskey and soda. Discussion was brisk.

The meditative Goblin then was called upon for his poems; and, after becoming hesitation, unfolded a sheaf of verses. His rhymes were always full of quaint and elvish humour which was very endearing. His ballade with the refrain "*When Harry Baillie kept the Tabard Inn,*" was voted the best of the six he read.

But the event of the evening was to be the serial story, which Forbes had

been appointed to begin. A new round of refreshments was distributed, and then the host took his place under the reading lamp.

"This needs a word of explanation," he said. "Having the whole vacation to work on this, naturally I did nothing until tea time this afternoon. I didn't even have an idea in my head until yesterday. About four o'clock yesterday afternoon I was strolling down the Broad in desperation. You know when there is some hateful task that has to be done, one will snatch at any pretext for postponing it. I stopped in at Blackwell's to look for a book I wanted. Up in one corner of the shop, lying on a row of books, I found this."

Impressively he drew from his pocket a double sheet of notepaper and held it up.

"It was a letter, evidently written by some girl to a man at the 'varsity. Finding it there, forgotten and defenseless, I could not resist reading it. It was a very charming letter, not too intimate, but full of a delicious virgin coyness and reserve. Then a great idea struck me. Why not take the people mentioned in the letter and use them as the characters of our story? We know that they are real people; we know their first names; that's all we know about them. The rest can be left to the invention of the Scorpions."

Generous laughter greeted the idea.

"Let's hear the letter!" cried someone.

"Yes," said Forbes, "before reading my chapter I'll read you the letter. And then remember that our story is

to be built up solely upon this document. There are to be no characters in the story except those mentioned in the letter, and our task must be to delineate them in such a way that they are in keeping with the suggestions the letter gives us. Here it is."

X X X X

These are from Fred.

318, BANCROFT ROAD,  
WOLVERHAMPTON.

October 30, 1912.

DEAR JOE:

Thank you so much for the tie—it is pretty and I do wear ties sometimes, so I sha'n't let the boys have it.

You must think me rather ungrateful not writing before, but I have been out the last two evenings and have had no time for letters. Yesterday Mother and I went to Birmingham as I had my half-term holiday.

I hope you managed to get some tea

after writing to me, otherwise I shall feel so grieved to think I was the cause of your starvation. By the way, I read your latest poem and I don't like it—not that that will trouble you much I'm sure. The idea isn't at all bad, but that's all I like about it.

I haven't a bit of news, and I have just found out it is too late to catch the post to-night, so you will have to wait a little longer for this precious letter—it will be precious, won't it?

Charlie has just come home from his class, so I must bring his food for him. Daddy's lumbago is better, I'm glad to say.

Good-night, and with many thanks

I remain

Yours,

KATHLEEN.

Excuse this scrawl, but the pen's groggy.

A moment of silence followed the reading of the letter.

"Joe's a lucky boy," said Whitney.

"She's a darling."

"The letter doesn't tell us much," said Forbes, as he handed it round for examination; "but more than you might think. Before writing my chapter I summarized the data. Here they are:

"1. *Joe*. He's a member of the 'varsity who writes poetry. Either it's published in some magazine or he sends it privately to her. The blighter has sent Kathleen a tie of some kind—probably a scarf with his college or club colours. He's got as far as the plaintive stage: he tells her that he is going without his tea just to write to her. (Probably half a dozen crumpets and four cups of tea were simmering inside of him as he wrote). So much for Joe. I'll wager he's a Rhodes Scholar!

"2. *Kathleen*. I put her at seventeen, and (as Whitney says) she's a

darling. She's at school still. She's adorably sane. She doesn't care for Joe's yowling poetry (probably he writes Verlaine kind of stuff, or free verse, or some blither of that sort). She has younger brothers ('the boys') and she helps her mother run the house. I think she likes Joe better than she cares to admit—see the touch of coquettishness where she says 'It *will* be precious, won't it?' And how adorably she teases him in those four crosses marked 'These are from Fred.' Gad, I'm jealous of Joe already!

"3. *Fred*. I think he's the older brother; probably recently left the 'varsity; a friend of Joe's, perhaps.

"4. *Charlie* is one of the younger brothers. He goes to some kind of night school or gymnasium. Probably

an ugly little beggar. Why doesn't he get his food for himself?

"5. *The Mother*. Don't know anything about her except that she went to Birmingham with Kathleen.

"6. *The Father*. Has lumbago."

"One thing you don't mention," said Graham. "It's an easy run from here to Wolverhampton on a motor bike!"

"Rather a sell if Joe should turn out a boxing blue, and mash us all into pulp for bagging his letter!" said Whitney. There was a general laugh at this. Whitney was over six feet, rowed number 5 in the Balliol boat, and was nicknamed the Iron Duke for his muscular strength.

"Go on with your chapter, Priapus," said the Goblin.

## II

WHEN Forbes had finished there was general laughter and applause. The whimsical idea of building a tale around the persons of the letter was one which his playful mind was competent to develop, and he had written a deft and amusing introduction. Taking "Joe" as his subject he had sketched that gentleman's character with a touch of irony. He had made him a Rhodes Scholar from Indiana (evoking good-natured protest from Minters) and had carried him on a vacation to Guilford House, a small hotel in London much frequented by

Rhodes Scholars. There he had made him meet Kathleen who, with her mother, was staying in London for a few days. Forbes had a taste for brunettes, and in his description of the imagined Kathleen he had indulged himself heartily. He found her to be seventeen, slender, with that strong slimness that only an English girl achieves; with a straight brown gaze and abundant dark chestnut hair. She was captain of her school hockey team, it seemed; she was good at tennis and swimming and geometry; she had small patience with poetry and sentiment. But within the athletic and straightforward flapper Forbes thought he saw the fluttering of deeper womanhood; the maiden soul erecting a barrier of abrupt common sense about itself to conceal the shy and

sensitive feelings that were beginning to blossom. Such at any rate was Kenneth Forbes's psycho-analysis, and he developed his chapter toward a climax where Kathleen and Joe were left walking in Regent's Park, and the next author would find some difficulty in knowing how to proceed with the second instalment.

"Well done indeed!" cried Blair, as Forbes laid down his manuscript and reached for his pipe. There was a general murmur of assent as the men got up to stretch and talk. Someone punched the coals into flame, and the bowl of fruit was passed round.

"Who's to write the next chapter?" asked Graham.

"Let Falstaff do it!" cried Blair.  
"He's the sentimentalist! But go easy

on poor Joe. You know all Rhodes Scholars don't come from Indiana! Have a heart!"

"Do whatever you like to Joe!" cried Forbes; "But be careful with Kathleen! She's adorable! I'm going to write a ballade to her and mail it to her anonymously."

"I wish there was some way of getting hold of her picture," said Keith.

"Her picture?" said Graham. "Nonsense! Why not see the flapper herself? I'm going to bike over there on my Rudge, erb round till I find the street, and then skid like hell right on to her doorstep. I shall lie there in mute agony until I'm carried indoors."

"I say, now, that's no fair!" cried

Forbes. "I discovered her! Just because you've got a motor bike you mustn't take an advantage!"

"Look here," said the Goblin, mildly, speaking from a blue cloud of Murray's Mixture, "we must all sign a protocol, or a mandamus or a lagniappe or whatever you law men call it, not to steal a march. I think we'd all like to meet the real Kathleen. But we must give a bond to start fair and square, and nobody do anything that isn't authorized by the whole club."

"Right-O!" cried several voices.

"All right, then," said the Goblin, "fill glasses everyone, and we'll solemnize the oath. Brother Scorpions, I do you to wit that we all, jointly and severally, promise not to take any steps toward making the acquaintance of said

Kathleen until so authorized by the whole society. So help me God!"

They all drank to this, with some chuckles.

"What a lark if we could get Kathleen down for Eights Week!" said someone.

"Very likely Joe will have her here," said Whitney. "You seem to forget that he's been rowing this course for some time."

They all scowled.

"I wonder how many members of the 'varsity are called Joe?" Keith asked.

"About three hundred, I dare say," said Falstaff.

"I tell you what we might do," said Forbes. "When the yarn's finished we can send it to her, explain just how the whole thing happened, and ask permis-

sion to call. She's got a sense of humour, I'll swear!"

"Balmy!" retorted Falstaff. "She'd probably be frightfully fed because you bagged her letter! 'S a hell of a thing to do, crib a lady's letter!"

"It's a hell of a thing to do to leave it lying around!" cried Forbes, impenitent. "No quarter for Joebags! Let the punishment fit the crime."

"Well, you chaps, I've got to sheer off," said Whitney. "It's nearly eleven and I've got an essay on the stocks. Cheer-o Priapus, I've had a ripping time."

"'Arf a mo,'" cried Forbes. "Who's to do the next chapter, and where do we meet next week?"

"Falstaff!" cried several voices.

"Why not do two chapters a week,"

said Carter. "I'll do one, and Goblin can do another. Let's meet in my rooms."

This was agreed to, and after much scuffling with greatcoats and scarves the guests tramped off down the stairs and out into the rainy quad. Forbes could hear them, a minute later, thundering with their heels on the huge iron-studded college gate as they waited for the porter to let them out. The room was foul with smoke, and he opened a window over the gardens letting in a gush of chill sweet air and rain. Through the darkness he could hear many chimes, counting eleven. He looked wearily at the scribbled notes for his essay on Danton and Robespierre; then shrugged his shoulders and went to bed.

### III

BY THE time that Carter and King had written their chapters and read them aloud, the Scorpions were all frankly adorers of Kathleen; by mid-term she had become an obsession. Eric Twiston and Bob Graham, "doing a Cornstalk" (as walking on Cornmarket Street is elegantly termed) were wont to dub any really delightful girl they saw as "a Kathleen sort of person." At the annual dinner of the club, which took place in a private dining room at the "Clarry" (the Clarendon Hotel) in February, Forbes was called upon to respond to the toast

"The Real Kathleen." His voice, tremulous with emotion and absinthe frappé, nearly failed him; but he managed to stammer a few phrases which, thought at the time to be extemporaneous, called forth loud applause; but it was found later that he had jotted them down on the tablecloth during the soup and fish courses. "Fellow Scorpers," he said, "I mean you chaps, look here, I'm not much at this dispatch-box business, but—hem—I want to say that I regard Kathleen with feelings of iridescent emotion. I feel sure that she is a pronounced brunette and that the Blue Flapper we all used to see at the East Ocker is nowhere. Y've been playing lackers (lacrosse) this term and I give you my word that when I've been bloody well

done in and had an absolute needle of funk I had only to think of Kathleen to buck me up. Hem. Now gentlemen, you may think I'm drunk (loud cries of *No!*) but I want to say in truth and soberness that any man who thinks he's got Kathleen for bondwoman—hem—has me to reckon with!"

The applause at this speech was so immoderate that a party of Boston ladies dining with a Chautauqua lecturer in the Clarendon's main dining room, shuddered and began looking up time-tables to Stratford.

By this time the serial story had grown to the length of seven or eight chapters, and the Scorpions became so engrossed in the fortunes of the Kenyons (so, for convenience, they had dubbed Kathleen's family) that at the

dinner a separate health was drunk to each character in the story, and one of the members was called upon to reply. Falstaff Carter responded to the toast to "Joe," and recounted his secret investigations into the number of members of the university who bore that name. He claimed to have tabulated from the university almanac 256 men so christened, and offered to go into the life history of any or all of them. He said that he was happy to say that the only Joseph who seemed at all likely to be a poet was a scrubby little man at Teddy Hall, who wore spectacles and a ragged exhibitioner's gown and did not seem to threaten a serious rivalry to any Scorpion bent on supplanting him. "I also find," he added, "that the master of the New College and Mag-

dalen beagles is called Joe. He is a member of the Bullingdon, and if he is the cheese it's distinctly mooters whether any of the Scorpers have a ghostly show; but I vote, gentlemen, that we don't crock at this stage of the game."

It was decided at the dinner that during the ensuing Easter vacation the Scorpions should make a trip to Wolverhampton, en masse, for the purpose of picketing Bancroft Road and finding out what Kathleen was really like. And then, after singing "langers and godders" (Auld Lang Syne and God Save the King) the meeting broke up and the members dispersed darkly in various directions to avoid the proctors.

#### IV

FRIDAY the fifteenth of March was the last day of term. The Scorpions, busy in their various ways with the hundred details that have to be attended to before "going down," were all pleasantly excited by the anticipation of their quest, which was to begin on the morrow. Carter, shaking hands with the warden of New College in the college hall (a pleasant little formality performed at the end of each term) absent-mindedly replied "Wolverhampton" when the warden asked him where he was going to spend the vacation. He was then hard put to it to

avoid a letter of introduction to the vicar of St. Philip's in that city, an old pupil of the warden. King, bicycling rapidly down the greasy Turl with an armful of books, collided vigorously with another cyclist at the corner of the High. They both sprawled on the curb, bikes interlocked. "My god, sir!" cried the Goblin; "Why not watch where you're going?" Then he saw it was Johnny Blair. "Sorry, Goblin," said the latter; "I—I was thinking about Kathleen." "So was I," said King, picking up his books. And in defiance of the University statute of 1636 (still unrepealed) which warns students against "frequenting dicing houses, taverns, or booths where the nicotian herb is sold," they went into Hedderly's together to **buy** tobacco.

After breakfast the next morning they were all in cabs on their way to the Great Western Station. It was a mild and sunny day, with puffs of spring in the air. Who can ever forget the Saturday morning at the end of term when the men "go down"? Long lines of hansoms spinning briskly toward the station, with bulging portmanteaus on the roof; the wide sunny sweep of the Broad with the 'bus trundling past Trinity gates; a knot of tall youths in the 'varsity uniform of gray "bags" and brown tweed norfolk, smoking and talking at the Balliol lodge—and over it all the clang of a hundred chimes, the gray fingers of a thousand spires and pinnacles, the moist blue sky of England. . . . Ah, it is the palace of youth, or it was once.

The Scorpions met on the dingy north-bound platform. Graham, Keith, and Twiston had been obliged to scratch owing to other more imperative plans; but five members boarded the 10 o'clock train in high spirits. Forbes, Carter, King, Blair, and Whitney—they filled a third-class smoker with tobacco and jest.

"Now, Goblin," cried Falstaff, as the train ran past the Port Meadow, and the Radcliffe dome dropped from view; "Open those sealed orders! You promised to draw up the rules of the game."

King pulled a paper from his pocket.

"I jotted down some points," he said.

"This is the time to discuss them.

*" Rules to be Observed by the Scorpions on  
the Great Kathleen Excursion*

"1. The headquarters of the expedition will be the Blue Boar Inn at Wolverhampton.

ton. (I've written to them to engage rooms.)

"2. The Kriegspiel will begin to-day at 2 P. M., and manœuvres will continue without intermission until someone is declared the winner, or until time is called.

"3. The object of the contest is to make the acquaintance of Kathleen; to engage her in friendly conversation; to win her confidence, and to induce her to accept an invitation to Commem, or Eights Week.

"4. Any deception, strategy, or tactics which are not calculated to give intolerable distress or embarrassment to Kathleen and her family, are allowable.

"5. If by noon on Tuesday no one shall have succeeded in making friends with Kathleen, the game shall be declared off."

"Suppose she's not at home?" said Whitney.

"We'll have to chance that."

"What time do we get there?"

"I've ordered lunch at the Blue

Boar at one o'clock. This train gets to Wolverhampton at 12:30."

It was a merry ride. The story of Kathleen as they had written it was discussed pro and con.; the usual protests were launched at Carter for having in his chapter lowered the theme to the level of burlesque; praise was accorded to the Goblin for the dexterity with which he had rescued the plot. Blair's chapter had been full of American slang which had to be explained to the others. "Joe," the Rhodes Scholar hero, had shown a vein of fine gold under Blair's hands: he bade fair to win the charming Kathleen, although the story had not been finished owing to the examinations which had fallen upon the brotherhood toward the end of term. The game, begun in pure jest, had taken

on something of romantic earnest: there was not one of these young men who did not see in Kathleen his own ideal of slender, bright-cheeked girlhood. And when the train pulled into Wolverhampton, they tumbled out of their smoking carriage with keen expectation.

## V

PERHAPS the best way to pursue the next episodes in the quest is in the words of Johnny Blair, the Rhodes Scholar, who jotted down some notes in a journal he kept:

We got to Wolverhampton 12:25, Ingersoll time. Had a jolly trip on the train, all the Scorps laying bets as to who would be first to meet Kathleen. I lay low, but did some planning. Didn't want to let these English blighters get ahead of me, especially after all the ragging Indiana Joe got in the story.

Train stopped at Birmingham at

noon. My tobacco pouch had run empty, and I hopped out to buy some Murray's at the newsstand. Saw the prettiest flapper of my life on the platform—the real English type; tweed suit, dark hair, gray eyes, and cheeks like almond blossoms. She had on a blue tam-o' shanter. Loveliest figure I ever saw, perfect ankle, but the usual heavy brogues on her feet. Why do English girls always wear woollen stockings? Was so taken with her I almost missed the train. She got into a third-class compartment farther up the train. The others were all bickering in the smoking carriage, so they didn't see her.

I scored over the rest of the crowd when we got to Wolver. They had all brought heavy portmanteaus, con-

taining all their vacation baggage. My idea was, go light when chasing the Grail. Had only my rucksack, left rest of my stuff at coll., to be forwarded later. While the other chaps were getting their stuff out of the goods van I spotted Miss Flapper getting off the train. She got into a hansom. Just by dumb luck I was standing near. I heard her say to cabby: "318, Bancroft Road!" Lord, was I tickled? I kept mum.

Most of the fellows took cabs, on account of their luggage, but Goblin and I hoofed it. Wolverhampton seems a dingy place for Kathleen to live! Fine old church, though, and lovely market place. We kept our eyes open for Bancroft Road, but saw no sign.

When we got to the Blue Boar, lunch was all ready for us in the coffee room. Landlord tickled to death at our arrival. Wonderful cheddar cheese, and arch-deacon ale. We made quite a ceremony of it—all drank Kathleen's health, and on the stroke of two we got up from the table.

All the others beat it off immediately in different directions—looking for Bancroft Road, I expect. I had an idea that more finesse would be needed. I started off with the others, then pretended I had left my pipe, and came back to the Boar. I was going to look up the town directory, to find Kathleen's name—knowing the address, that would be easy. But there was Goblin doing the same thing! We both laughed and looked it up together. The name

at 318, Bancroft Road was Kent, Philip Kent, F. S. A., Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, I suppose: the book put him down as an "antiquarian." Kathleen's father, evidently.

Goblin disappeared in that noiseless way of his, and I lit a pipe and pondered.

The fellows had been full of wild suggestions as to what they would do when they got to 318, Bancroft Road. One was going to be a book agent and get into the house that way. Another said he would be the grocer's man and make friends with the cook. Someone else suggested dressing up as a plumber or gas-man, and going there to fix some imaginary leak. Knowing that the Kents were not fools, I imagined it wouldn't be long before they'd get wise

to the fact that that bunch of dreadnoughts was picketing the house. Probably they'd put the police on them. Also, there's nobody harder to disguise than an English 'varsity man. He gives himself away at every turn. If "Fred" was around he'd be sure to smell a rat. One of those chaps would be likely to fake himself up as a plumber, and get in the house on some pretext or other—still wearing his wrist-watch!

I thought it wouldn't be a bad idea to stay away from Bancroft Road for a while and try to pull wires from a distance.

The Blue Boar Inn—a very nice old house, by the way—looks out over the old Wolverhampton market place. In one corner of the square I had noticed a

little post office. You can send a telegram from any post office in England, and I thought that would be my best entering wedge. The word "antiquarian" in the directory had given me a notion. On a blank I composed the following message, after some revisions:

MISS KATHLEEN KENT,  
318, Bancroft Road,  
WOLVERHAMPTON.

My friend John Blair of Trinity now in Wolverhampton for historical study staying at Blue Boar nice chap American may he call on you if so send him a line sorry can't write hurt hand playing soccer love to all.

JOE.

This was taking a long chance, but was the best move I could think of. I asked the lady behind the counter to

mark the telegram as though it came from Oxford. She said she could not do so, but I happened to have a five-bob piece in my pocket and that persuaded her. I convinced her that it was a harmless joke.

I didn't see that there was anything further to be done immediately. If the telegram brought no word I should have to think up something else. In the meantime, if I was to pose as an antiquarian investigator I had better get up some dope on the history of Wolverhampton. I poked about until I found a bookshop, where I bought a little pamphlet about the town, and studied a map. Bancroft Road was out toward the northern suburbs. A little talk with the bookseller brought me the information that Mr. Kent was

one of his best customers, a pleasant and simple-minded gentleman of sixty whose only hobby was the history of the region. He had written a book called "Memorials of Old Staffordshire," but unfortunately I couldn't get a copy. The bookseller said it was out of print.

Then I went to have a look at St. Philip's Church, a fine old Norman pile with some lovely brasses and crusaders' tombs. Here I had a piece of luck—fell in with the vicar. One of the jolly old port-wine and knickerbocker sort: an old Oxford man, as it happened. I pumped him a little about the history of the church, and in his delight at finding an American who cared for such matters he talked freely. "Why," he kept on saying, with a kind

of pathetic enthusiasm, "I thought all you Americans were interested in was Standard Oil and tinned beef." Finally he invited me over to the vicarage for tea. As I sat by his fire and ate toasted muffins I couldn't help chuckling to think how different this was from the other Scorpions' plan of attack. They were probably all biting their nails up and down Bancroft Road trying to carry the fort by direct assault. It's amazing how things turn out: just as I was wondering how to give the conversation a twist in the right direction, the vicar said:

"If you're really interested in the history of this region you should certainly have a talk with old Mr. Kent. He's our leading antiquarian, and knows more about the Stour Valley than any

one else. He says there was a skirmish fought here in 1645 that all the books have overlooked. The Battle of Wolverhampton, he calls it. He wrote a little pamphlet about it once."

I assured the good parson that my eagerness to know more about the Battle of Wolverhampton was unbounded. I nearly spilled my tea in my excitement.

"Is that Mr. Kent of 318, Bancroft Road?" I asked.

"Yes," answered the vicar. "How did you know?"

"They told me about him at the bookshop."

I explained that I was in Wolverhampton for a day or so only, and finally the excellent man came across with the suggestion I was panting for.

“Well,” he said, “as it happens, I have one or two calls to make in that direction this evening. If you care to have me do so, I’ll speak to Mr. Kent about you, and he can make an appointment. You said you were stopping at the Blue Boar?”

I thanked him with such warmth that his eyes twinkled.

“My dear fellow,” he said, “your enthusiasm does you great credit. I wish you all success in your thesis.”

I got back to the Boar feeling that I had done a very good afternoon’s work indeed.

## VI

THE Scorpions (continues Blair's diary) were all very merry at dinner that night—particularly at my expense. I was the only one who had not been out to Bancroft Road to look over the ground. Apparently they had had a very cheery time.

"Well, Falstaff, what luck?" I asked Carter.

"Splendid!" he replied. "The local butcher has given me a job and I'm going to call there for a meat order tomorrow morning."

"What!" shouted someone. "On Sunday? Not likely!"

I knew mighty well that Carter would not concoct anything as crude as that, and wondered what deviltry he had devised.

"I noticed that two telegrams were delivered at the house this afternoon," said Forbes, in a quiet, non-committal kind of way.

"Perhaps Joe is on his way here," said I. "If so, Good-Night!" As I spoke, I wondered rather anxiously what the *other* telegram could be.

"Well, we saw her, anyway!" said Whitney, "and she's marvellous! She wears a blue tam o' shanter and has an ankle like a fairy tale. We saw her walk down the street."

"That's nothing," I retorted, "I saw her hours ago. She was on the train with us from Birmingham this morning."

This started a furious wrangle. They said I hadn't played fair, as the contest didn't begin until two o'clock. My point was that I had not transgressed the rules as I had done nothing to profit by my accident in seeing her first.

"I couldn't help seeing her, could I?" I asked. "You could have, too, if you hadn't been all frowsting over *Tit-Bits* in the train. And after all, I didn't *know* it was Kathleen. I only suspected it."

I changed the conversation by asking where the Goblin was.

No one had noticed before that he hadn't turned up. This was a bit disconcerting. I secretly thought him the most dangerous competitor. He has a quiet, impish twinkle in his eye,

and an unobtrusive way of getting what he wants. However, the others scoffed at my fears.

Although they all talked a great deal about the amusing time they had had, I could not gather that they had really accomplished much. Forbes claimed to have seen Fred, and said he looked like a rotter. We drank Kathleen's health a couple of times, and then the other three sat down to dummy bridge. I slipped away to the Public Library, partly to get some more of my antiquarian information about Wolverhampton, and partly because I knew my absence would disquiet them.

I found the Library after some difficulty. In the large reading-room I hunted up some books of reference,

but to my disappointment Mr. Kent's volume was out. Looking round for a place to sit, the first person I saw was the Goblin, bent very busily over a book and making notes on a pad of paper. I leaned over him.

"Hello, Goblin," I whispered. "Getting ready for a First?"

He started, and tried to cover his volume with a newspaper, but I had seen it. It was a cook book.

"That's a queer kind of fiction you're mulling over," I remarked.

"I'm looking up a recipe for stuffed eggs," said the Goblin, without a quiver. "Our Common Room steward does them so poorly."

"Well, don't let me interrupt you," I said. I sat down in a corner of the room with a volume of the Britannica.

When I next looked up the Goblin was gone.

As usual, I wasted my time with the encyclopedia. I got interested in the articles on Wages, Warts, Weather, Wordsworth, and Worms. By the time I got to Wolverhampton it was closing time. I did just seize the information that the town was founded in 996 by Wulfruna, widow of the Earl of Northampton. Then I had to leave.

I got back to the Boar about ten-thirty. The coffee-room was empty. The landlord said that Whitney and Forbes were out, but that Mr. Carter had gone upstairs.

Falstaff and I were rooming together, and when I went up I found him reading in bed.

"Hello, Wulfruna!" he said, as I came in.

Evidently he, too, had been reading up some history. Just as I got into bed he fell asleep and his book dropped to the floor with a thump. I crept quietly across the room and picked it up. It was "Memorials of Old Staffordshire," by Philip Kent, F. S. A., the very copy that I had looked for at the Library. I skimmed over it and then put it carefully back by Falstaff's bedside. Was he on the antiquarian trail, too? I began to realize that these rivals of mine would take some beating.

The next morning (Sunday) I found a note waiting for me on the breakfast table. Three indignant Scorpions were weighing it, studying the handwriting,

and examining the stationery like three broken-hearted detectives.

"It's not Kathleen's hand, but I'll swear it's the same notepaper," Forbes was saying.

Under a venomous gaze from all three I took the letter out of the room before opening it. Forbes was right: it was the well-known Bancroft Road notepaper. It ran thus:

318, BANCROFT ROAD,  
WOLVERHAMPTON  
Saturday Evening.

DEAR MR. BLAIR,

Mr. Dunton, the vicar of S. Philip's, has just told me of your visit to him. I am so glad to know that you take an antiquarian interest in this region. Curiously enough, only this afternoon we had two wires from our cousin Joe in Oxford, one of which mentioned your being here. That gives

us additional reason for looking forward to making your acquaintance.

Mrs. Kent wants you to come to lunch with us to-morrow, at one o'clock. Unfortunately I myself am laid up with rheumatism, but some of the family will be delighted to take you to see the quite surprising relics in this vicinity. Joe has probably told you all about Fred, who is really quite one of the family. The poor fellow needs exercise dreadfully; you must take him with you if you go tramping. Charlie and Oliver, my boys, are away at school.

Don't attempt to reply to this, but just turn up at one o'clock.

Sincerely yours,

PHILIP KENT.

This gave me several reasons for thought, and disregarding the appeals from the coffee-room to come in and tell them all about it, I walked into the courtyard of the Inn to consider.

First, what was the *other* wire from Joe? Heavens, was he on his way from Oxford to Wolverhampton? If my fake telegram were discovered too soon I should be in a very embarrassing position. Second, Joe was a cousin, was he! One of those annoying second cousins, probably, who are close enough to the family to be a familiar figure, and yet far enough away in blood to marry the daughter! And then there was this sinister person, Fred, who was "really quite one of the family." Another cousin, perhaps? What was the matter with the devil, anyway? If he needed exercise why didn't he go and get it? Certainly I didn't want to spend an afternoon antiquarianizing with him. How was I to get him out of the way, so that I could get a tête-à-tête with K.?

I could see that if this game was to be played through successfully it must be played with some daring. *Toujours de l'audace!* I thought, and let breakfast go hang. Moreover, my sudden disappearance would help to demoralize my rivals. I stuck my head into the breakfast-room where Priapus was just dishing out the bacon and eggs. In that instant it struck me again that the Goblin was not there. I cried "Ye Gods!" in a loud voice, and slammed the door behind me. As I ran out of the front door I laughed at the picture of their disconcerted faces.

My idea was to lure Fred away from Bancroft Road at all hazards. This could only be done by another telegram. And as it was Sunday, the railway station was the only place to send one

from. It was a beautiful, clear morning, and I hurried through the streets with exultation, but also with a good deal of nervousness as to the outcome of this shameless hoaxing. At any rate, I thought, I may as well live up to my privileges as an irresponsible American. The Great Kathleen Excursion was beginning to take on in my mind the character of an international joust or tourney.

At the station (or at the depot as one would say at home), I sent the following message:

FREDERICK KENT,  
318, Bancroft Road,  
WOLVERHAMPTON.

Unavoidably detained Oxford hurt leg playing soccer wish you could join me at once urgent.

JOE.

I got back to the Boar in time for a cold breakfast. None of the others was there. I ate with my antiquarian notes on Wolverhampton propped against the coffee pot. I was determined that Mr. Kent should find me as intelligent as possible.

There was nothing to be done before lunch time. I read Mr. Kent's letter over several times, and I must confess that the mention of that other wire from Joe worried me a good deal. Just how far the telegram I had just sent might conflict with the facts as known to the Kents, I could not surmise. I could only trust to luck and pray for the best. I learned from the chambermaid that the Goblin had come in very late the night before, and had gone out at

six A.M. That bothered me almost more than anything else.

Finally, after hanging round the empty coffee-room for a while, I got nervous, and determined to go to morning service at St. Philip's. There would be plenty of time to get out to Bancroft Road afterward, and perhaps Kathleen would be at church and I could get a distant view of her. I walked round to the church. Service had begun, but I went in and sat down at the back. During a hymn I took a good look round. To my horror I saw in a pew a few feet in front of me a young person whose robust outline seemed familiar. I looked again. It was Falstaff Carter in the get-up of a curate. Trembling with indignation, I crept out of the church. I hardly dared

speculate on what low device he had planned for winning his way into the sanctum.

At any rate, I thought, I am fixed for lunch: once I get there, I guess I can gain ground as fast as any pseudo-curate. I ran over my antiquarian data another time.

It was half-past twelve, and I was just brushing my hair for the third time, preparatory to starting for Bancroft Road, when the chambermaid came to the bedroom door. "This note was just left for you, sir." I tore it open.

BANCROFT ROAD,  
Sunday Morning.

MY DEAR MR. BLAIR,

I am afraid you will think it very strange, but, owing to a sudden domestic disarrangement, will you come to *supper*, this evening.

instead of to luncheon? I am exceedingly embarrassed to have to make this change, but (to be quite frank) one of our maids has been taken ill, and our luncheon to-day will have to be a haphazard affair. We are also rather distressed by strange news from our cousin at Oxford.

But we shall be very happy to see you at supper time, seven o'clock.

Cordially yours,

PHILIP KENT.

It came over me that this was pretty dirty work we were putting up on the poor gentleman, and I suddenly felt thoroughly ashamed of myself. I don't know whether any of the others came back to the Boar for lunch, or not. I put on my cap and went for a long walk in the country, out toward Tettenhall Wood. I didn't come back until tea time.

## VII

AS JOHNNY BLAIR approached number 318, Bancroft Road, a little before seven o'clock that bland March evening, he bore within his hardy breast certain delicacies, remorse, doubts, and revulsions. But all these were transcended by his overmastering determination to see this superb and long-worshipped maiden near at hand.

Bancroft Road proved to be a docile suburban thoroughfare, lined with comfortable villas and double houses, each standing a little back from the street with a small garden in front. A prim-

rose-coloured afterglow lingered in the sky, and the gas lights along the pavement still burned pale and white. Just as the Rhodes Scholar passed number 302 he saw a feminine figure run down the steps of a house fifty yards farther on, cross the pavement, and drop a letter into the red pillar box standing there. Even at that distance, he distinguished a lively slimness in the girlish outline that could belong to no other than the Incomparable Kathleen. He hastened his step, casting hesitance to the wind. But she had already run back into the house.

It would have added to the problems Mr. Blair was pondering could he have read the letter which had just dropped into the post-box. Perhaps it will somewhat advance the course of the

narrative to give the reader a glimpse of it.

318, BANCROFT ROAD,  
Sunday Afternoon.

DEAR JOE:

Goodness knows what has happened to this usually placid house. Never again will I complain to you that there is no excitement in Wolverhampton.

I got home from Birmingham yesterday noon and since then everything has been perfectly absurd. I can only believe you have gone balmy.

First comes your wire about Mr. Blair and your having hurt your arm playing soccer. What you can have been doing at soccer I can't conceive. I supposed it was a mistake for hockey, or else some kind of a twit. Well, I couldn't see what I could do to help a historical student but I showed Dad the wire and the old dear said he would write Mr. Blair a line.

I had just settled down to help Mother

with some sewing when along comes your second wire, addressed to her. Mother and I threw up our hands and screamed! Certainly we thought you were off your crumpet. Why on earth should you send us another cook when you know Ethel has been here for so long? I read the wire forward and backward but it could mean nothing else. It said: *Have found very good cook out of place am sending her to you earnestly recommend give her a trial reliable woman but eccentric name Eliza Thick will call Sunday morning.*

Well, we all had a good laugh over this, and wondered what kind of a joke you were up to. Then, after supper, to our amazement, came a third wire—not from you, this one, but to Dad, and who do you suppose from? The Bishop of Oxford if you please! Dad was so flustered (you know how telegrams excite him: they offend all his antiquarian instincts!)—well, the Bishop said—*Am sending my favourite curate to call on you magnificent young fellow*

*excellent family very worthy chap will be in Wolverhampton a day or two anxious to have him meet your family.*

Well, this rather flabbergasted us, but Dad took it rather as a matter of course, after the first surprise. He used to know the Bishop well—in fact, he dedicated his book to him. “Quite all right, my dear,” Dad kept saying. “I dare say the young man has some antiquarian problems to talk over. Too bad I’m so crippled with rheumatism.”

After supper along came Mr. Dunton, and began to talk about a charming young American who had been calling on him, and who did it prove to be but your friend Mr. Blair, who had been quite put out of our minds by the later telegrams. So Dad sat down right away and wrote a note to Mr. Blair at the Blue Boar asking him for luncheon to-day, and sent it up by the gardener’s boy.

But this morning, when I had just decided not to go to church (you’ll see why

in a minute) comes your perfectly mad message to Fred, about hurting your leg at soccer and all the rest of it. This convinced us that you are quite crazy. How could we send Fred all that way alone! And when did you take up soccer anyway?

But we know what a mad creature you are anyway, so we simply suspected some deep-laid twit. Now I come to the queerest thing of all!

Ethel went out last night, for her usual Saturday evening off, and hasn't returned! In all the years she's been with us, Mother says, it's the first time such a thing ever happened. And before breakfast this morning, turns up this Eliza Thick person of yours, with a note from Ethel to say that she was sick but that her friend Eliza would see us through for a day or so. Well, you surely have a queer eye for picking out domestics! Of all the figures of fun I ever imagined, she is the strangest. I don't think she's quite right in her head. I'll tell you all about her when I see you.

Really, I roar with laughter every time I look at her!

I haven't got time to say more. With this Eliza person in the kitchen goodness knows what may happen. We had to send a note to Mr. Blair not to come for luncheon, the house was so upset. We heard a fearful uproar in the lower regions this afternoon and found Eliza engaged in ejecting some kind of gas-man who said he had come to see the meter (on Sunday, if you please!)

Everything seems quite topsy turvy. And Mr. Blair is coming to supper in a few minutes, and that favourite curate of the Bishop's, too. I think I shall have to stay down in the kitchen to see that Eliza Thick gets through with it all right. I can forgive you almost anything except her!

Never, never say again that nothing happens in Bancroft Road!

Yours,

KATHLEEN.

## VIII

A RUDDY-CHEEKED housemaid in the correct evening uniform admitted Blair, and in the drawing-room he found Mr. Kent sitting by a shining fire. Points of light twinkled in the polished balls of the brass andirons. As soon as he entered, Blair felt the comely atmosphere of a charming and well-ordered home. Books lined the walls; a French window opened on to the lawn at the far end of the room; a large bowl of blue hyacinths, growing in a bed of pebbles, stood on the reading table. Mr. Kent was small, gray-haired, with

a clear pink complexion and a guileless blue eye.

"Mr. Blair," he said, laying down his paper, "I am very glad to meet you. A friend of Joe's is always welcome here, and particularly when he's an antiquarian. I know you'll excuse our seeming rudeness in putting you off at luncheon."

Blair bowed, and made some polite reply.

"As a matter of fact," said Mr. Kent, "my wife was embarrassed this morning by strange happenings in the domestic department. Our cook, usually very faithful, did not turn up, and sent a substitute who has caused her—well, mingled annoyance and amusement. I have not seen the woman myself: my rheumatism has kept me

pretty close to the fire this damp weather; but by all accounts the creature is very extraordinary. Well, well, you are not interested in that, of course. It is very pleasant to meet a fellow antiquarian. How<sup>d</sup> did you happen to visit Wolverhampton? We have a number of quite unusual relics in these parts, but they are not so well known as they should be."

"To tell the truth, sir," said Blair, "it was your book, which I came across in the college library. I was particularly interested in your account of St. Philip's Church, and I made up my mind that I ought to see it. You see, we in America have so little antiquity of our own that these relics of old England are peculiarly fascinating to us."

“Quite so, quite so!” said Mr. Kent, rubbing his hands with pleasure. “Magnificent! Well, well, it is certainly a delight to hear you say so. After supper we will dismiss the ladies and have a good crack. There are some really startling things to be learned about Wolverhampton in Anglo-Saxon times. You know the town lay along the frontier that was much harried by the Danes, and Edward the Elder won a conspicuous victory over the invaders at Tettenhall, which is a village very near here.”

“Yes,” said Blair, “I walked out there this afternoon.”

“Did you, indeed! Well, that was a proof of your perspicacity. You may recall that in my book I referred to the battle at Tettenhall——”

"That was in 910, was it not?" queried Blair, adroitly.

"Precisely. It is mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle."

"Edward the Elder died in 924, didn't he?" asked the ruthless American.

"About that time, I think. I don't remember exactly. Upon my word, Mr. Blair, you have taken up history with true American efficiency! I do wish that our young men had the same zeal. I am happy to say, however, that I am expecting a young cleric this evening, a protégé of the Bishop of Oxford, who is, I believe, also interested in these matters."

Blair's heart sank, but he had no time to ponder, for at this moment Mrs. Kent and Kathleen came in.

"My dear, this is Mr. Blair, Joe's

friend from Oxford. We are great cronies already. My wife, Mr. Blair, and my daughter Kathleen."

The young Oxonian suffered one of the most severe heart contusions known in the history of the human race. It was a positive vertigo of admiration. This was indeed the creature he had seen on the railway platform: a dazzling blend of girl and woman. The grotesque appellation "flapper" fled from his mind. Her thick, dark hair was drawn smoothly across her head and piled at the back in a heavenly coil. Her clear gray eyes, under rich brown brows, were cool, laughing, and self-possessed. She was that most adorable of creatures, the tweenie, between girl and woman, with the magic of both and the weaknesses of neither. Blair

could not have said how she was dressed. He saw only the arch face, the intoxicating clearness of her skin, the steady, friendly gaze.

"How do you do," he said, and remembering English reticence, hesitated to put out his hand; then cursed himself for not having done so.

Kathleen smiled, and murmured, "How do you do."

"I'm very glad to see you," said Mrs. Kent. "Do tell us what that crazy Joe has been up to. Did Mr. Kent tell you we've had three telegrams from her?"

Blair felt the room twirl under his feet. How one little pronoun can destroy a man! In his agony he saw Mrs. Kent and Kathleen sit down on the big couch, and painfully found his way to a chair.

"I—I beg your pardon?" he stammered. "I didn't just catch——"

"The mad girl has sent us three telegrams," said Mrs. Kent, "in which there was only one sensible thing, the reference to yourself. Her other remarks, about cooks and soccer and injured limbs, were quite over our heads."

With a dull sense of pain Blair felt Kathleen's bright eyes on him.

"Yes, Mr. Blair, is she ragging us? Or have the girls at Maggie Hall taken up soccer?" said a clear voice, every syllable of which seemed so precious and girlish and quaintly English that he could have clapped his hands.

He blessed her for the clue. "Maggie Hall!"—in other words, Lady Margaret Hall, one of the women's

colleges at Oxford. So "Joe" was (in American parlance) a "co-ed!"

"Why—er—I believe they *have* been playing a little," he said desperately. "I think he—er—something was said about having his—hum—her—arm—hurt in a rough game."

"Her leg, too," said Mr. Kent. "In my time, young girls didn't send telegrams about their legs. In fact, they didn't send telegrams at all."

"Well, we are quite nonplussed," said Mrs. Kent. "Kathleen says Joe must have had a rush of humour to the head. She wired for us to send Fred down to her. Of course she has sent wires to Fred before, as a joke; but she must have known we couldn't send him so far alone. I suppose Joe

has told you all about Fred? He's quite one of the family."

"Yes," said the distracted Oxonian. "He must be a fine fellow. I'm very anxious to meet him."

There was a ring at the front door bell, and in a kind of stupor Blair realized that something—he hardly knew what—was about to happen.

"The Reverend Mr. Carter," announced the maid.

Blair had a keen desire to scream, but he kept his eyes firmly on the rug until he had mastered himself. In the general movement that followed he had presence of mind enough to seize a chair next to Kathleen. He saw Falstaff's burly figure enter, habited as the conventional "black beetle" of the church, and in the

sharpened state of his wits noticed that the unpractised curate had put on his clerical collar the wrong way round. He rejoiced in Carter's look of dismay on finding his fellow-Scorpion already on the battlefield.

"Mr. Carter," said Mr. Kent, "this is Mr. Blair, of Trinity."

The two shook hands gravely.

Blair determined to make use of his hard-won information to set Carter astray.

"I know Mr. Carter by reputation," he said. "I have heard Joe speak of him in terms of great admiration."

The curate looked worried, but tried to play safe.

"Oh, yes, Joe!" he said. "Splendid chap."

Blair made haste to get back to the

chair he coveted. He had no idea what mad schemes might lurk beneath Carter's episcopalian frock, and was determined to gain any headway he could.

"It seems funny your coming to Wolverhampton," said Kathleen. "So few 'varsity men ever get here. But it's certainly a blessing for Dad. He'll talk antiquities with you as long as you like."

"Are you interested in the subject?" asked Blair.

"I'm afraid not," she laughed. "It's too bad Dad is so laid up with his lumbago. He'd love to walk you out to Tettenhall and Boscobel, to see his burial mounds."

"How very interesting!" said Blair. "A kind of private family cemetery?"

"Oh, dear no," declared Kathleen in amazement. "Antiquities, you know, where the Danes buried themselves."

"Of course, of course. How I wish I could see them! Are you fond of walking?"

"Yes, when it isn't too muddy. It's been too wet lately to go out with Fred. He loves a good long walk, but he's getting old and his rheumatism bothers him."

"I dare say he may have inherited that from your father?"

"It's very common among Scotties," said Kathleen.

"Oh, is your family Scotch?" said Blair, feverishly trying to be polite.

"Our family?" queried Kathleen with a smile. "Heavens, no! I thought

you were talking about Fred. You must see him, he's somewhere around."

"I should love to meet him," said Blair.

Kathleen went to the door and whistled. There was a scampering on the stairs, and a grizzled Skye terrier trotted into the room. Blair and Carter looked at each other sheepishly.

Mr. Kent had been referring to his watch several times, and Blair began to suspect that something was wrong. But just then supper was announced. As they passed into the dining-room, the American thought he noticed signs of agitation on the maid's face. He wondered secretly what the rest of the Scorpions were up to.

## IX

COME, Mr. Blair," said Mrs. Kent; "you sit there, next to Mr. Kent, where you can talk about archæology. Mr. Carter tells me he knows nothing about such subjects, so he will have to amuse Kathleen and me."

"What errand brings you to Wolverhampton, Mr. Carter?" inquired Blair, thinking to unmask his opponent's weapons as quickly as possible.

Carter was a little staggered by this, but his effrontery was up to the test.

"The Bishop sent me down," he said,

"to look over the surrounding parishes with a view to establishing a chapel in the suburbs."

"How very interesting!" exclaimed Mr. Kent. "But surely this does not lie in the Oxford diocese?"

"Quite true," said Carter. "The Bishop had to get special permission from Parliament. An old statute of the fourteenth century, I believe."

"Indeed! Indeed!" cried Mr. Kent. "How absorbing! My dear Mr. Carter, you must tell me more about that. I take it you are something of a historical student, after all."

"I'm afraid not, sir," replied Carter. "My studies in divinity have been too exacting to leave much opportunity——"

"You must not believe Mr. Carter's disclaimers," said Blair. "I have

heard of his papers before the Oxford Historical Society. He has a very sound antiquarian instinct. I think you would find his ideas of great interest."

"We were speaking of the battle with the Danes at Tettenhall," observed Mr. Kent, turning to Blair. "I think that if Kathleen could arrange to take you out there you would find the burial mounds of unusual interest. My dear, could you walk out there with Mr. Blair to-morrow morning?"

Kathleen assented, but Blair noticed that she was not eating her soup. He also noticed that the maid, in the background, was seized with occasional spasms, which he was at a loss to interpret.

"Did I hear you say Tettenhall?"

ventured Carter. "That is the very place the Bishop mentioned to me. He was particularly anxious that I should go there."

"You must come with us, by all means," said Kathleen.

"Bravo," said Mr. Kent, beaming genially upon the young people. "I wish I could go with you. You know they say Wulfruna, the widow of the Earl of Northampton, who founded Wolverhampton, had a kind of summer place once near Tettenhall, and I claim to have located—— By the way, my dear, what do you suppose has happened to this soup?"

"I think that Eliza Thick has a heavy hand with the condiments," said Mrs. Kent. "You may take away now, Mary."

"As I recall, Wulfruna founded the town about 996," observed Blair. "I presume it takes its name from her?"

"Exactly—Wulfruna-hampton. Really, Mr. Blair, your historical knowledge does you honour. I had no idea that Americans were such keen students of the past."

Blair began to think that he had overplayed his hand, for he noticed that Falstaff was getting in some private conversation with Kathleen. He attempted to catch her eye to ask a question, but Mr. Kent was now well launched on his hobby.

"Wulfruna was descended from Ethelhild, who was a granddaughter of Alfred the Great. You recall that the Etheling Ethelwold, the son of Alfred's brother Ethelred, took sides

with the Danes. To stem the invasion, Edward and his sister Ethelfled——”

“Ethel fled, that’s just the trouble,” interposed Mrs. Kent. “Kathleen, my dear, do run downstairs and see what’s wrong in the kitchen. I’m afraid Eliza is in difficulties again. Mr. Blair, you and Mr. Carter must excuse this irregularity. Our substitute cook is a very strange person.”

Kathleen left the room, and it seemed to Blair as though the sparkle had fled from the glasses, the gleam of candle-light from the silver. Across the cloth he had watched her—girlish, debonair, and with a secret laughter lurking in her eyes. And yet he had not had a chance to exchange half a dozen sentences with her.

The maid reëntered, whispered

something to Mrs. Kent, and began to place the dishes for the next course.

"Kathleen begs to be excused," said Mrs. Kent. "She thinks she had better stay in the kitchen to help Eliza."

"Oh, I say," cried the curate. "That's too bad. Do you think I could help, Mrs. Kent? I'm a very good cook. The Bishop himself has praised my—er—my——"

"Your what?" asked Blair.

"My ham and eggs," retorted the cleric.

"Perhaps you will let me wash the dishes," suggested Blair. "I should be only too happy to assist. I feel very embarrassed at having intruded upon you at so inconvenient a time."

"I should not dream of such a thing,"

said Mrs. Kent. "I believe that Eliza is perfectly capable, but as Joe said, she is eccentric."

"I am quite accustomed to washing dishes," said Carter. "In fact, the Bishop always used to ask me to do it for him."

"Dear me," remarked Mr. Kent, "surely the Bishop has plenty of servants to help in such matters?"

Blair applied himself to the food on his plate to which he had helped himself almost unconsciously. He well knew the daring hardihood of his rival, and feared that the other might find some excuse to follow Kathleen to the kitchen. As he raised his fork to his lips, suddenly his hand halted. The dish was stuffed eggs. His mind reverted to the Public Library the even-

ing before. Was it possible that the Goblin——?

He determined that the first thing to be done was to get Carter so firmly engaged with Mr. Kent that the wolf in cleric's clothing could not withdraw. Then perhaps he himself could frame some excuse for seeing what was going on downstairs.

“Mr. Kent,” he said, “you should draw out Mr. Carter concerning his views on amending the liturgy of the Established Church. He has some very advanced ideas on that subject which have attracted much attention at Oxford. One of his interesting suggestions is that radical churchmen should wear the clerical collar back side foremost, as a kind of symbol of their inverted opinions.”

The wretched Carter's hand flew to his neck, and he glared across the table in a very unecclesiastical manner.

"Really!" said Mr. Kent, "that is most interesting. I had noticed his modification of the customary dress. In what other ways, Mr. Carter, would you amend the ritual?"

The unfortunate curate was caught.

"Er—hum—well—that is, the Bishop and I both think that the service is too long," he faltered. "I am in favour of omitting the sermon."

"Hear, hear!" cried Mr. Kent. "It is most refreshing to hear a high churchman make such a confession. And what else do you propose?"

"Why—ah—hum—it has always seemed to me that the—thirty-nine

articles might—well—be somewhat condensed.”

“Bravo indeed, though I fear the Bishop would balk at that,” said his host.

The maid, appearing in the dining-room again, whispered to Mrs. Kent.

“Philip,” said the latter, “that gas-man is here again, and says he *must* see the meter. He claims that there is a dangerous leak which should be fixed at once. Perhaps I had better go down to the cellar with him. Your rheumatism——”

“My dear Mrs. Kent,” cried the curate, seeing his chance; “do nothing of the sort. It is the privilege of my cloth to take precedence when there is danger of any kind. If any one should be overcome by fumes, the consolations

of the church may be needed." And without waiting for another word, he leaped up and ran from the room.

Blair fidgeted in his chair, seeing himself outwitted, but there was nothing he could do.

"Pray go on with your supper, Mr. Blair," urged Kent. "You must overlook anything that seems strange this evening. Everything seems to be widdershins. Perhaps because it is St. Patrick's Day. I do believe that woman in the kitchen is at the bottom of it all. These stuffed eggs are positively uneatable! If I were not crippled with this lumbago I would go down and fire her out of the house."

"Let me do it for you!" cried Blair, half rising from his seat.

"Nonsense! I'm not going to sacri-

fice our good talk on antiquities so easily. I want very much to tell you about the Battle of Wolverhampton. The town was strongly loyalist in the great rebellion; in fact, in 1645 it was the headquarters of Prince Rupert, while Charles the First is said to have stopped at the Blue Boar for a drink——”

At this moment came a ring at the front door, and Mr. Kent stopped to listen. They heard a male voice mumbling to the maid, who then came to her mistress to report.

“There’s a policeman out here, ma’am, to see Mr. Kent.”

“A policeman?” queried the antiquarian. “What next, I wonder? Well, supper is suspended, send him in.”

And to Blair's dismay the gigantic form of Whitney, the Iron Duke, crossed the threshold, in the correct uniform of the Wolverhampton police force.

If Blair was dismayed, the counterfeit policeman was no less disgusted to see his fellow Scorpion sitting at the dinner table, but they gazed at each other without any sign of recognition.

"Begging your pardon for interrupting, sir, but the chief sent me around for a word with you. There's been a gang o' sneak thieves operating 'round 'ere, sir, and some of 'em 'as been getting admittance to 'ouses by passin' themselves off as gas inspectors, sir."

Mrs. Kent screamed.

"I 'ad a notion that one o' these

birds is along Bancroft Road to-night, sir, an' I wanted to warn you. Don't let the maid admit any tradesmen or agents from the gas company unless they 'as the proper badges, sir."

"Heavens, Philip!" cried Mrs. Kent. "That dreadful man is downstairs now! Eliza threw him out once this afternoon, but he's here again. He may have murdered Mr. Carter by this time. Oh, inspector, do hurry down at once and see what's happened! There's a defenceless high-church curate in the cellar with him. Mary, show the way downstairs."

Blair poured out a glass of water for Mrs. Kent.

"Don't you think I had better go down, too?" he asked.

"Oh, please don't go!" begged Mrs.

Kent, faintly. "Stay here, in case he should escape upstairs. I believe we shall all be murdered in our beds!"

"Come, come," said Mr. Kent. "We mustn't let all this spoil Mr. Blair's supper. Have another glass of wine. The policeman will attend to the gasman. We don't often get a chance to talk to a genuine antiquarian. I think, Mr. Blair, that you will be greatly interested in the architectural restoration of our parish church. It exemplifies the worst excesses of the mid-Victorian period. The church itself is one of the finest examples of the cruciform type. The south transept dates from the thirteenth century; the nave, clerestory, and north transept from the fifth. The chancel was restored in 1865, but I must con-

fess that the treatment of the clere-story seems to me barbarous. Now what are your own ideas as to the proper treatment of a clerestory?"

The wretched American was non-plussed. He had a shrewd suspicion that matters were moving rapidly downstairs yet he did not see any way of leaving the dining-room to investigate for himself. He had hardly heard what was said.

"Why—ah—to tell you the truth, Mr. Kent, I read very little fiction nowadays. I'm rather worried about that gas-man downstairs. Do you suppose your daughter can be in any danger? There might be some sort of explosion—don't you think I had better run down to see if I can help?"

As they sat listening Kathleen's

voice was heard from the kitchen, raised in clear and angry tones.

Blair could contain himself no longer. With an inarticulate apology he hurried out of the room, leaving the puzzled antiquarian and his wife alone at the supper table.

# X

THE Rhodes Scholar was correct in having feared the Goblin as a dangerous competitor in the quest of the Grail. King, as we have intimated before, was a quaint-minded and ingenious person, modest in stature but with a twinkling and roving eye. He was one of the leading spirits of the OUDS, known in full as the Oxford University Dramatic Society, and his ability to portray females of the lower classes had been the delight of more than one Shakespearean rendering. No one who saw him as Juliet's nurse in a certain private theatrical per-

formance in the hall of New College can recall the occasion without chuckles.

When the Goblin left the Blue Boar on Saturday afternoon he also made his way out to Bancroft Road; but instead of patrolling the main street in the vague hope of catching a glimpse of Kathleen (as did Falstaff, Priapus, and the Iron Duke), he hunted out the hinder regions of the district. In accordance with a plan he had concocted before leaving Oxford, he carried a little portfolio of "art subjects," of the kind dear to domestic servants, and with this in hand he approached the door of the basement back kitchen, where Ethel the cook and her assistant, Mary, the housemaid, were having a mid-after-

noon cup of tea. The windings of the humbler lanes of service, behind the Bancroft Road houses, were the proper causeway for tradesmen, and it was easy for him to reach the back garden gate unseen by those in front.

He knocked respectfully at the kitchen door, and Mary came to answer.

"Good day, Miss," said the supposed pedlar. "I 'ave some very pretty pictures 'ere which I wish you would let me show you."

Mary was a simple-minded creature, but she knew that her mistress had strict rules about pedlars.

"I'm sorry," she said, "but Missus don't let no pedlars in the house."

"If you please, Miss," said the artful Goblin, "I am no pedlar, but rep-

resenting a very respectable photographer, and I would like to show you some photographs in the 'ope of getting your order. I 'ave taken a number of orders at the nicest 'ouses along Bancroft Road. I thought maybe you would like to 'ave a photo of yourself taken, to send to your young man." And he opened his case, exhibiting a sheaf of appropriate photos.

It was a slender chance, but the pedlar had a wheedling eye and a genteel demeanour, and Mary hesitated. She called the cook, a stout, middle-aged person, who came to the door to see what was up. The pedlar rapidly showed the best items of his collection, which he had selected with great care in a photographer's studio in Oxford. Fate hung in the scales,

but the two servants could not resist temptation. They knew that Mrs. Kent and Miss Kathleen were upstairs sewing; and the master was confined to his study with his rheumatism. They invited the photographer into the kitchen.

It is a psychological fact well known to housekeepers that there is a vacant hour in the middle of the afternoon when Satan sometimes finds a joint in the protective armour of the domestic servant. After the luncheon dishes are washed and put away, and before five-o'clock tea and toast are served, cook and housemaid enjoy a period of philosophic contemplation or siesta. Even in the most docile and kitchen-broken breast thoughts of roses and romance may linger; dreams

of moving pictures or the coming cotillion of the Icemen's Social Harmony. Usually this critical time is whiled away by the fiction of Nat Gould or Bertha Clay or Harold Bell Wright. And close observers of kitchen comedy will have noted that it is always at this fallow hour of the afternoon that pedlars and other satanic emissaries sharpen their arrows and ply their most plausible seductions.

The Goblin has never admitted just what honeyed sophistries he employed to win the hearts of the simple pair in Mrs. Kent's kitchen. But the facts may be briefly stated by the chronicler. After getting them interested in his photos he confessed frankly that he was an old friend of the family from Oxford. He said that he and

Miss Kathleen were planning an innocent practical joke on the family, and asked if he could take the place of one of the servants for that Sunday. He made plain that his share in the joke must not be revealed to any one. And then he played his trump card by showing them the text of the bogus telegram recommending Miss Eliza Thick, which he had dispatched from a branch postal office on his way through the town.

“And is Miss Josephine in the joke, too?” inquired the cook.

This question startled the Goblin, but he kept his composure and affirmed that he and Miss Josephine had concocted the telegram jointly in Oxford. And by a little adroit pumping he learned “Joe’s” status

in the family. The cook, Ethel, admitted that she was to go out that evening for her Saturday night off. At last the Goblin, by desperate cunning and the exhibition of two golden sovereigns, completely won the hearts of the maids. While they were talking the door-bell rang, and Mary, returning from the upper regions, announced that it was "another telegram from Miss Joe. Missus and Miss Kathleen laughed fit to kill when they read it," she said.

"You see?" said the Goblin. "That's the same telegram I just showed you. It's all right; it's a joke. You don't need to worry, cook. Mrs. Kent won't be angry with you. You let me take your place for tomorrow, and write a little note saying

you're ill and that your friend Eliza Thick will do your work for the day."

It was arranged that the Goblin should meet Ethel at her home that night to borrow some clothes. The cook showed him the menu for Sunday that Mrs. Kent had sent down. This rather daunted the candidate for kitchen honours, but he copied it in his notebook for intensive study. Then, as it was close upon tea-time, he packed up the photos, distributed his largesse, and retired. Mary, the housemaid, promised to stand by him in the coming ordeal. Both the servants felt secretly flattered that they should be included in the hoax. The kitchen classes in England have great reverence for young 'varsity men.

The Goblin was a canny man, and

he had brought with him a wig and certain other properties. He hunted out a little tea shop, where he meditated over three cups of pekoe and hot buttered toast. Then he made his way to the Public Library, where he spent several hours over a cook-book. He was complimenting himself on having shaken the other Scorpions off his trail when Blair looked over his shoulder and caught a glimpse of the stuffed-eggs recipe to which the Goblin was addressing himself for the fourth time. The meeting was embarrassing, but it could not be helped. After Blair had left him, the cook-to-be returned to his memoranda.

Mrs. Kent trusted many things to Ethel's judgment, and her instructions as jotted down on a slip of

paper included three possibilities. "*Eggs, stuffed, devilled, or farci,*" she had written, and the Goblin was endeavouring to decide which of these presented the least distressing responsibility. He was a student of mathematics, and had attempted to reduce the problem to a logical syllabus. He read over his memoranda:

THEOREM: STUFFED EGGS.

*Data:* six hard, boiled-eggs (20 minutes).

- (a) Cut eggs in halves lengthwise.
- (b) Remove yolks, and put whites aside in pairs.
- (c) Mash yolks, and add
  - (1) Half the amount of devilled ham.
  - (2) Enough melted butter to make of consistency to shape.

("Half *what* amount of devilled ham?" thought the Goblin. "And where does the devilled ham come from? How does one devil a ham? What a pity Henry James

never wrote a cook-book! It would have been lucid compared to this. *To make of consistency to shape*—what on earth does that mean?”)

(d) Clean and chop two chickens' livers, sprinkle with onion juice, and sauté in butter—

(“No!” he cried, “that's *eggs farci*. Wrong theorem!”)

(d) Make in balls (“Make *what* in balls?”) size of original yolks (“Note: remember to measure original yolks before cutting them lengthwise”).

(e) Refill whites (“Let's see, what did I fill 'em with before?”).

(f) Form remainder of mixture into a nest. (“That's a nice little homely touch.”)

(g) Arrange eggs in the nest and

(1) Pour over one cup White Sauce.

(“Memo: See p. 266 for White Sauce.”)

(2) Sprinkle with buttered crumbs.

(“Allow plenty of time for

buttering those crumbs; that sounds rather ticklish work.")

(3) Bake until crumbs are brown.

(h) Garnish with a border of toast points and a wreath of parsley.

*Q. E. D.*

"Integral calculus is a treat compared to this," he said to himself as he reviewed the problem. "I hope they have plenty of parsley in the house. That nest may need a little protecting foliage. I don't see how I can make any kind of proper asylum for those homeless, wandering eggs out of that mess." So saying, he left the library to call upon Ethel at her home and complete his disguise.

## XI

MRS. KENT was a deal puzzled by the bearing and accoutrements of her substitute cook. Eliza Thick appeared on the premises about seven o'clock, and with the aid of the housemaid breakfast went through fairly smoothly. It was Kathleen's query about the coffee that elicited the truth. Mary, with nervous gigglings, announced to her mistress that Ethel was ill and had sent a substitute. The coincidence that Josephine's nominee should turn out to be a friend of Ethel struck Mrs. Kent as strange, and presently she went down to interview the new kitcheneer.

Eliza Thick, a medium-sized but rather powerfully fashioned female, generously busted and well furnished with rich brown hair, was washing the dishes. She curtsayed respectfully as Mrs. Kent entered the kitchen.

"Good morning," said Mrs. Kent. "You are Eliza Thick?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"You brought a note from Ethel?"

"Yes, ma'am;" and fumbling in an opulent bosom, Eliza drew forth a crumpled scrap of paper.

"I had a telegram from my niece in Oxford recommending you. How did she know of you?"

"I worked at Lady Marg'ret 'All, ma'am, where the young lady is studyin'."

“Why did you leave your place there?”

“If you please, ma’am, my dishes was so tasty that it made the young ladies discontented when they got ’ome. Their parents complained that it gave ’em too ’igh ideas about wittles. The principal said I was pamperin’ ’em too much, an’ offered to release me.”

Mary, who was listening, gave a loud snort of laughter, which she tried to conceal by rattling some plates.

“Well, Eliza,” said Mrs. Kent, “that will do. You must get on with the work as best you can. Judging by the coffee this morning, I don’t think your cooking will have the same effect on us that it did on the students at Lady Margaret Hall. We were

expecting a guest for lunch but I will have to put him off until supper. I have written out the menu for the day. Mary will give you any help she can."

"If you please, ma'am?" said Eliza.

"Yes?"

"Cook gave me a message for Miss Kathleen, ma'am, which she asked me to deliver in person."

"A message for Miss Kathleen?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Well, you can tell me, I will tell Miss Kathleen."

"Cook said I was to give it to her personally," said the persistent Eliza.

"How very extraordinary," said Mrs. Kent. "What did you say was the matter with Ethel—is it anything contagious?"

"Oh, no, ma'am, I think it's just a

touch of —of nervous debility, ma'am— too many white corpuscles, ma'am."

"Well, I don't think Miss Kathleen can come down now, Eliza; we have just had a very strange telegram which has rather upset us."

"Yes, ma'am."

The new cook sat down to peel potatoes and study the mechanics of Kitchencraft. She found much to baffle her in the array of pots and pans, and in the workings of the range. From a cupboard she took out mince-meat choppers, potato mashers, cream whippers, egg-beaters, and other utensils, gazing at them in total ignorance of their functions. Mrs. Kent had indicated jugged hare and mashed potatoes for lunch, and after some scrutiny of the problem

Eliza found a hammer in the cabinet with which she began to belabour the vegetables. Mary, who might have suggested boiling the potatoes first, was then upstairs.

By and by Kathleen heard the thumping, and came into the kitchen to investigate.

“Good morning, Eliza.”

“Good morning, Miss,” said the delighted cook. “Oh, I *am* so happy to see you, Miss!”

“Thank you, Eliza. Did you have a message for me from Ethel?”

“Yes, Miss. Er—Ethel said she hoped you’d give me all the help you can, Miss, because—er, you see, Miss, cooking for a private family is very different from working in a college where there are so many, Miss.”

"I see. Well—what on earth are you doing to those potatoes, Eliza?"

"Mashing 'em, Miss."

"What, with a *hammer*!"

"I washed the 'ammer, Miss."

"Surely you didn't mash them that way at Maggie Hall, Eliza?"

"Yes, miss. The young ladies got so they couldn't abide them done any other way."

Kathleen looked more closely, and examined the badly bruised tubers. "Good gracious," she exclaimed, with a ripple of laughter. "They haven't been cooked yet!"

Eliza was rather taken aback.

"Well, you see, Miss," she said, "at the college we used nothing but fireless cookers, and I don't understand these old-fashioned stoves very well. I

wanted to get you to explain it to me."

"It's perfectly simple," said Kathleen. "This is the oven, and when you want to bake anything — *Phew!*" she cried, opening the oven door, "what *have* you got in here?"

She took a cloth, and lifted out of the oven a tall china pitcher with a strange-looking object protruding from it.

Eliza was panic stricken, and for an instant forgot her rôle.

"My Cod! I put the hare in there and forgot all about it. What a bally sell!"

Kathleen removed the hideous thing, hardly knowing whether to laugh or cry.

"Look here, Eliza," she said. "They may jug hares that way at Maggie

Hall, but I doubt it. Now, what *can* you cook? We've got guests coming to-night. A gentleman from America is going to be here and we must put our best foot forward."

Eliza's face was a study in painful emotion.

"Excuse me, Miss," she said, "but is that American gentleman called Mr. Blair?"

"Yes," said Kathleen. "Really, Eliza, you are most extraordinary. How did you know?"

"I've heard of him," said Eliza. "I think I ought to warn you against him, miss. He's—he's a counterfeiter."

"Nonsense, Eliza. What notions you do have! He's an antiquarian, and he's coming to see my father about archæology. He's a friend of Miss

Josephine, from Oxford. Now I think you'd better get on with your cooking and not worry about counterfeiters."

"Miss Kathleen," said Eliza, "I think I'd better be frank with you. I want to tell you——"

Here Mary came into the kitchen, and although Eliza Thick made frantic gestures to her to keep away, the housemaid was too dense to understand. The opportunity for confession was lost.

"Now, Eliza," said Kathleen, "Mary will help you in anything you're not certain about. I'll come down again later to see how you're getting on."

By supper time that night Eliza Thick began to think that perhaps she had made a tactical error by interning herself in the kitchen where there was

but small opportunity for a tête-à-tête with the bewitching Kathleen. The news that Blair was coming to the evening meal was highly disconcerting, and the worried cook even contemplated the possibility of doctoring the American's plate of soup with ratsbane or hemlock. Once during the afternoon she ventured a sally upstairs (carrying a scuttle of coal as a pretext) in the vague hope of finding Kathleen somewhere about the house. Unfortunately she met Mrs. Kent on the stairs, who promptly ordered her back to her proper domain. Here Eliza found a disreputable-looking person trying to cozen Mary into admitting him to the house. He claimed to be an agent of the gas company, in search of a rumoured leak. Eliza immediately spotted Priapus, and in-

dignantly ejected him by force of arms. In the scuffle a dish pan and several chairs were overturned. Mary, whose nerves were rather unstrung by the sustained comedy she was witnessing, uttered an obbligate of piercing yelps which soon brought Kathleen to the scene. Eliza received a severe rating, and so admired the angry sparkle in Kathleen's eyes that she could hardly retort.

"One other thing, Eliza," said Kathleen, in conclusion. "There are to be two guests at supper. Mr. Carter, a curate from Oxford, is coming, too. Please allow for him in your preparations."

"If you please, Miss," cried the much-goaded cook, "is that Mr. Stephen Carter?"

"I believe it is," said Kathleen, "but what of it? Is he a counterfeiter, too?"

"Miss Kathleen, I know you think it strange, but I must warn you against that curate. Dear Miss Kathleen, he is dangerous. He is not what he seems."

"Eliza, you forget yourself," said Kathleen, severely. "Mr. Carter comes with an introduction from the Bishop of Oxford. I hope that is satisfactory to you! In any case, we do not need your approval for our list of guests. Mrs. Kent wants you to take great care with the stuffed eggs. Those mashed potatoes made her quite ill."

"Please, Miss, I'm dreadful worried about those eggs. The book says to make a nest for 'em, and truly I don't know how to go about it. The young

ladies at college never ate their eggs in nests, miss. And when I gets nervous I can't do myself justice, Miss. I never can remember which is the yolks and which is the whites, miss."

"Now, that will do, Eliza," said Kathleen. "You are a very eccentric creature, but I don't think you are as stupid as all that. What do you want? Do you expect me to come down here and oversee all your preparations?"

"Oh, if you only would, Miss, it would be *so* gratifying!"

Kathleen laughed, a girlish bubbling of pure mirth, which was dreadful torment to the jealous masquerader. She departed, leaving the cook a prey to savage resolve. "Well," thought Eliza, "if the supper is bad enough I

guess she'll just *have* to come down and help me. Thank goodness Blair and Carter are *both* coming; they'll cut each other's throats, and perhaps the stuffed eggs will win after all. As for that gas-man, he won't get into this house unless it's over my dead body!"

## XII

IT WAS a feverish and excited Eliza that Kathleen found in the kitchen when she tripped downstairs after the soup course. On a large platter the cook had built a kind of untidy thicket of parsley and chopped celery, eked out with lettuce leaves. Ambushed in this were lurking a number of very pallid and bluish-looking eggs, with a non-descript stuffing bulging out of them.

"I forgot to measure the yolks, Miss," wailed Eliza. "That's why the stuffing don't fit. Shall I throw a dash of rum on board to stiffen 'em up?"

In spite of her vexation, Kathleen

could not help laughing. "No, no," she said. "We'll tidy up the nest a bit and send them upstairs."

"That's grand," said Eliza, watching Kathleen's quick fingers. "'Tis a beautiful comely hand you have, miss, one that it's a pleasure to admire."

"Now, Eliza," said Kathleen, "you must not shout up the dumb waiter so. I distinctly heard you cry out '*This plate's for the parson!*' as you sent up one of the dishes of soup."

"If you please, Miss," said Eliza. "That was because it was the plate I spilled a spoonful of pepper into, and I thought it had better go to the cloth than anywhere else. Miss Kathleen, I have something very urgent to say to you before them two counterfeiterers

upstairs commit any affidavits or sworn statements."

"You dish out the eggs, Eliza," said Kathleen, "and I'll send them up the dumb waiter. Quick, now! And where's your dessert? Is it ready?"

"All doing finely, Miss," answered Eliza, but as she opened the oven door her assurance collapsed. She drew out a cottage pudding, blackened and burnt to carbon.

"A great success," said the bogus cook, but holding it on the other side of her apron so that Kathleen could not see. "Here, I'll just shoot it up the shaft myself before it gets cold." She hurried into the pantry, whisked it into the dumb waiter before Kathleen could catch a glimpse, and sent it flying aloft.

"That smelt a little burnt, cook," said Kathleen.

"Just a wee bit crisp on one side, miss."

Kathleen was in the pantry, with her nose up the dumb-waiter shaft, sniffing the trail of the cottage pudding and wondering whether she ought to recall it for inspection, when Eliza, turning toward the back door, saw the gas-man on the threshold. The cook's mind moved rapidly in this emergency. She knew that if Priapus found himself face to face with Kathleen, dangerous exposures would follow at once.

"Mary," she whispered to the maid, who had just come down from upstairs, "run tell the Mistress the gas-man is here again. I'll send him down the cellar." And while Kathleen was still

in the pantry and before the pseudo gas-man could demur, Eliza seized him by the coat and hurried him across the kitchen to the cellar door. She opened this and pointed downstairs. The bewildered gas-man disappeared down the steps and Eliza closed the door and turned the key.

"Now, Miss," said Eliza. "I have something very serious to say to you——"

Just at that moment she saw the clerical black of the Reverend Mr. Carter coming down the kitchen stairs.

"—and that is, we'd best get this fruit up without delay," and seizing a large bowl of apples, oranges, and bananas, she passed it to Kathleen and backed her into the pantry again.

Kathleen unsuspectingly pushed the fruit up the dumb waiter and meanwhile it took no more than an instant for Eliza to take the curate by the arm, motion him to silence, and push him toward the cellar door.

"He's down there," she whispered, and Carter innocently followed his fellow Scorpion. Again Eliza closed the door and turned the key.

"Well, Eliza," said Kathleen, "I don't think you're much of a cook, but you're a willing worker."

"Miss Kathleen," said the cook, who was now more anxious than ever to cleanse her bosom of much perilous stuff, "are you very down on practical jokes?"

"Practical jokes? Why, yes, Eliza. I think they are the lowest form of

humour. Good gracious! I do believe we've forgotten the coffee! Have you got it ready?"

"Yes, Miss; yes, Miss; right here," said Eliza, bustling to the stove. "But don't you think, miss, that a frank confession atones for a great deal?"

"Really, Eliza, you are the most priceless creature! I don't wonder Joe was taken with you! Hush! There's the front-door bell; what do you suppose that is?"

They both listened, Kathleen at the dumb-waiter shaft and Eliza at the kitchen door. Eliza started to say something, but Kathleen waved her to be quiet. A heavy step sounded on the stair, and the agitated Mary appeared, followed by a huge policeman. Eliza, of course, recognized the

Iron Duke, but the gas-light and the disguise prevented the latter from knowing his fellow venturer.

"What on earth is the matter?" said Kathleen.

"Please, Miss," said the blue-coat, "your mother said there's a gas-man down here and I've been sent by headquarters to take him in charge. I think he's a sneak thief."

"There's no such person here, officer," said Kathleen.

Eliza still kept her sovereign wits about her. She advanced to the policeman, and whispering mysteriously "He's in here," took his sleeve and led him to the cellar door.

"He's down there," she repeated; "put the cuffs on him, quick!" She opened the door, and the doubtful

policeman, hypnotized by her decision, stepped on to the cellar stairs. The door closed behind him, and again Eliza turned the key.

"What does all this mean?" demanded Kathleen, angrily. "Has everybody gone daft? Eliza, ever since you came into the house, there has been nothing but turmoil. I wish you would explain. Why have you sent the policeman into the cellar?"

"There's three dangerous counterfeiters down there, Miss," said Eliza. "I want to tell you the truth about this, Miss Kathleen, before that American gets down here—he's bound to be here soon. He's the worst of the lot."

"Open that door at once!" said Kathleen, stamping her foot. "I don't

know what on earth you mean by counterfeiters, but if there are any down there, let's have them up, and see what they have to say."

The dining-room bell rang, and Mary instinctively hurried upstairs. At the same moment Blair ran down, three steps at a time, and bounded into the kitchen. He started when he saw Eliza.

"Are you all right, Miss Kent?" he asked, anxiously. "I've been so worried about you. Is that gas-man still here? I think I can smell gas escaping. Can I help in any way?"

"What you smell is a burnt cottage pudding," replied Kathleen. "There's a policeman in the cellar, I wish you'd call him up. I have a great mind to

ask him to take Eliza in charge. I don't think she's quite right."

Blair looked at Eliza closely.

"I agree with you, Miss Kathleen," he said. "She looks like a bad egg to me—a devilled egg, in fact. Which is the cellar door, cook?"

Eliza saw her chance.

"Right here, sir," she said, taking hold of the door knob. She swung the door open.

"Looks very dark," said Blair. "I can't quite see the step. Where is it?"

Eliza, eager to add this last specimen to her anthology in the cellar, stepped forward to point out the stairway. With one lusty push Blair shoved her through the door, and banged it to. He turned the key in the lock and thrust it into his pocket.

"Miss Kent," he said, "I'm afraid you must think us all crazy. If you will only let me have five minutes' uninterrupted talk with you, I can explain these absurd misadventures. Please, won't you let me?"

"To tell you the truth," said Kathleen, "I'm hungry. I've had only a plate of soup, and that was—counterfeit. I think that mad woman intended it for the curate, for whom she had conceived a dislike."

"Let's go up and sit in the dining-room, and I can talk while you eat."

At that moment Mrs. Kent's voice sounded at the top of the stairs.

"Kathleen, dear, is everything all right?"

"Yes, Mother," called Kathleen in

the same silvery soprano that set Blair's heart dancing.

"Your father wants Mr. Blair to come up to the drawing-room and talk to him. He wants to tell him about the Battle of Wolverhampton."

### XIII

BLAIR, nervously playing with a key, stood by the fire in the drawing-room. Mrs. Kent had excused herself and gone upstairs. In the dining-room, across the hall, he could see Kathleen gleaning over the supper table while the maid cleared away the dishes. In spite of his peevishness, he smiled to see her pick up one of the stuffed eggs on a fork, taste it, and lay it down with a grimace. At the other end of the drawing-room Mr. Kent, leaning on his cane, was rummaging among some books.

“Here we are,” said the antiquarian,

hobbling back with several heavy tomes. "Here is Clarendon's History. Now I want to read you what he has to say about that incident in 1645, then I will read you my manuscript notes, to show you how they fill up the gaps. Kathleen!"

"Yes, Dad," answered Kathleen, coming into the room.

"Will you get me my glasses, dear?"

"Yes, indeed," and she ran across the room to fetch them from the bookcase where he had left them. She seated herself on the arm of her father's chair. She was a charming and graceful figure, swinging the slender ankle that the Scorpions afterward described with imaginative fervour as "a psalm," "a fairy-tale," and "an aurora borealis." They none of them

ever agreed as to the dress she wore that evening; but Eliza Thick, who was perhaps the most observant, declared that it looked like a chintz curtain. I think it must have had small sprigs of flowers printed on it. Her eyes, exclaimed the broken-hearted gas-man, were like "a twilight with only two stars." Perhaps he meant a street with two lamps lighted.

"Oh, I'm so glad you're going to read your notes to Mr. Blair," she said, mischievously. "They are so fascinating, and there's such a jolly lot of them."

"Perhaps Mr. Kent's eyes are tired?" said Blair, hastily.

"Not a bit, not a bit!" said Mr. Kent. "I don't often get such a good listener. By the way, what happened

to that nice young curate? I hope the gas-man didn't injure him?"

Kathleen looked at Blair with dancing eyes.

"He had to go," declared Blair. "He was awfully sorry. He asked me to make his apologies."

"Perhaps the Bishop sent for him suddenly," said Kathleen.

"Well," resumed Mr. Kent, "I shall begin with the Battle of Naseby. After that memorable struggle, a portion of the royalist forces——"

The front-door bell trilled briskly.

"Oh, dear me," sighed poor Mr. Kent, looking up from his papers. "The fates are against us, Mr. Blair."

The Scotch terrier had been lying by the fire, caressed by the toe of Kathleen's slipper, as she sat on the

arm of her father's chair. Suddenly he jumped up, wagging his tail, and barked with evident glee. A tall, dark-eyed girl, a little older than Kathleen, pushed the hall curtains aside and darted into the room.

"Joe, you darling!" cried Kathleen. "How's your leg?"

"What do you mean?" asked Joe. "Which leg? What's wrong with it?"

"Well, Joe, my dear, this is a jolly surprise," said Mr. Kent, laying aside his books. "We heard you were laid up. Some misunderstanding somewhere. We've got a friend of yours here, you see—Mr. Blair."

Blair wished he could have sunk through the floor. He would have given anything to be with the other

four in the darkness of the cellar. His ears and cheeks burned painfully.

"How do you do, Mr. Blair," said Josephine, cordially. "There must be some mistake, I've never met Mr. Blair before."

"My dear Joe," cried Kathleen, "I do think we have all gone nuts. Look here!" She took three sheets of paper from the mantelpiece. "Did you or did you not send us those telegrams?"

Joe ran her eye over the messages, reading them aloud.

"*Miss Kathleen Kent:*

"*My friend Blair of Trinity now in Wolverhampton for historical study staying at Blue Boar nice chap American——*"

Here Joe raised her eyes and looked appraisingly at Blair, whose confusion was agonizing.

*"may he call on you if so send him a line sorry can't write hurt hand playing soccer love to all. Joe."*

*"Frederick Kent: Unavoidably detained Oxford hurt leg playing soccer wish you could join me at once very urgent. Joe."*

She bent down to the terrier which was standing affectionately at her feet.

"Well, Fred, old boy," she said, patting him, "did Joe send you a telegram, heh?"

*"Mrs. Philip Kent: Have found very good cook out of place am sending her to you earnestly recommend give her a trial reliable woman but eccentric name Eliza Thick will call Sunday morning. Joe."*

"My dear Kathleen," said Joe, "you flatter me. I never sent any of those

messages. Do you know any other Joes?"

"I beg your pardon, Miss Kent," said Blair. "But I must tell you. I sent two of those telegrams, and I think I can guess who sent the other. Miss Eliza Thick herself."

"You!" exclaimed Mr. Kent and both girls in the same breath.

"Yes, Mr. Kent. I blush to confess it, but you and your family have been abominably hoaxed, and I can see nothing for it but to admit the truth. Painful as it is, I prefer to tell you everything."

The two girls settled themselves on the couch and Mr. Kent, bewildered, sat upright in his chair. The dog, satisfied that everything was serene, jumped on the divan and lay down

between Joe and Kathleen. The unhappy Blair stood awkwardly on the hearth rug.

"Last January," he began, "a gentleman by the name of Kenneth Forbes, an undergraduate of Merton College (now studying the gas meter in your cellar), was in Blackwell's book shop, in Oxford, browsing about. Lying on a row of books in a corner of the shop he happened to see a letter, without an envelope. He picked it up and glanced at it. It had evidently been dropped there by some customer.

"The address engraved on the paper was 318, Bancroft Road, Wolverhampton. It was dated last October and the letter began: 'Dear Joe, Thank you so much for the tie—it is pretty and I do wear ties sometimes,

so I sha'n't let the boys have it.' In the upper left-hand corner were four crosses, and the words 'These are from Fred.' The letter was signed 'Kathleen.'"

The two girls looked at each other.

"It so happened," continued Blair, "that the man who found the letter had promised to write, the very next day, the first chapter of a serial story for a little literary club to which he belonged. At the time when he found this letter lying about the bookshop he was racking his brain for a theme for his opening chapter. A great idea struck him. He put the letter in his pocket and hurried back to his room.

"His idea was to build up a story around the characters of the letter.

He had no idea whom it came from or to whom it was addressed. The thought of making these unknown persons of the letter the figures of the story appealed to him, and with an eager pen he set down the first chapter, with 'Kathleen' as heroine and 'Joe' as hero."

A faint line of colour crept up Kathleen's girlish cheek.

"This idea, which suggested itself to Forbes when he found the letter in the bookshop, was taken up enthusiastically by the group of undergraduates composing the little club. The fabrication of the story was the chief amusement of the term.

"It would be unfair to me and to the other men not to say frankly that the whim was not taken up in any

malicious or underhand spirit. Given the idea as it first came to the man in the bookshop, the rest flowed naturally out of it, urged by high spirits. I must tell you honestly that the characters of that letter became very real to us. We speculated endlessly on their personalities, tastes, and ages. We all became frantic admirers of the lady who had signed the letter, and considered ourselves jealous rivals of the man 'Joe,' to whom, as we supposed, it had been written. And when the end of term came, the five members who had entered most completely into the spirit of the game agreed to come to Wolverhampton for the express purpose of attempting to make the acquaintance of the Kathleen who had so engaged their fancy."

"Really, I think this is dreadfully silly," said Kathleen, colouring. "Joe, are we characters in a serial, or are we real persons?"

"This confession is very painful for me, Mr. Kent," said Blair, "because things don't seem to have turned out at all as we thought, and I'm afraid we have abused your hospitality barbarously. I can only beg that you will forgive this wild prank, which was actuated by the most innocent motives."

"Then do I understand," asked Mr. Kent, "that your interest in Wolverhampton history was merely simulated, for the purpose of making the acquaintance of my daughter?"

"You make me very much ashamed, sir, but that is the truth."

Mr. Kent rose to his feet, leaning on his cane.

"Well, well," he said, "I have no wish to seem crabbed. I'm sorry to lose so excellent a listener. I thought it was too good to be true! But when one has a daughter one must expect her to grow up, and become the heroine of serial stories. I trust that that story is not to be published—I can ask that, at least!"

"Our intention," said Blair, "was to give the manuscript to Miss Kent as a token of our united admiration."

"Well," said Mr. Kent, "make my apologies to the other conspirators. I take it that that dreadful Eliza Thick was one of them. I hope our cook will be back to-morrow. Upon my word, those stuffed eggs were inde-

scribable! Joe, my dear, suppose you let me take you up to see your aunt. I expect these people will want to recriminate each other a little, and reach some sort of misunderstanding."

Joe and Mr. Kent left the room, but a moment later Mr. Kent reappeared at the door.

"Mr. Blair," he said, "please don't think me lacking in sportsmanship. I was young once myself. I just wanted to say that I think you all staged it remarkably well. Give Mr. Carter my compliments on that telegram from the Bishop."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Blair, as Mr. Kent vanished behind the curtains. "I forgot. Those fellows are still down in the cellar." He held out the key. "I must let them out."

"Wait a minute," said Kathleen. "I have no desire to see that Eliza Thick again, nor that odious curate—not even the enterprising gas-man!"

For the space of fifteen thoughts or so there was silence. Kathleen sat at one end of the big couch, the fire-light shimmering round her in a softening glow. Blair stood painfully at the other side of the hearth.

"Miss Kathleen," he said, "I want to beg you, on behalf of the other fellows, not to be too severe with them. I guess I'm the worst offender, with my bogus telegrams and my deliberate deception of your father. But I ought to explain that we all came here with a definite intention in mind. The man who was first able to engage you in friendly conversation and get you

to accept an invitation to come to Oxford for Eights Week, was to be the winner of the competition."

"I've already accepted an invitation for Eights Week," she said, after a pause.

He uttered a dejected silence that was a classic of its kind, a marvel of accurate registration.

Kathleen looked up at him for the first time since his confession of the hoax. Their eyes met.

"Is it Carter?" he asked, woefully.

"I've promised to go and stay with Joe at Maggie Hall."

"Look here," he said. "I expect to row in the Trinity boat. Will you and your mother and—and Miss Joe—watch the racing from our barge, one afternoon anyway? Then you could

come to tea in my rooms afterward, and I'll ask the other fellows in to meet you."

"The parson and the policeman and the gas-man, and—and—Eliza Thick?"

"Yes. They're all splendid chaps, I know you'll like them."

"Well," she murmured, "I dare say Eliza Thick would be all right in his proper costume. I shall never forget his nest-building genius! Now I understand what he meant by all that talk about counterfeiters."

"You will come to the Trinity barge?" he begged.

There was a pause. A dropping coal clicked in the grate, and Kathleen's small slipper tapped on the fender.

"I should think," she said, "that

a man as persistent as you would make a good oar. I'm glad the others aren't Americans, too. It was bad enough as it was!"

"Miss Kathleen," he pleaded, "I guess I can't make you understand what I'd like to. But if you'll just come punting up the Cher, on Sunday in Eights Week, there are so many things I'd like to tell you."

"Yes, I've always wanted to hear about America, and the difference between a Republican and a Democrat."

"And you *will* come?"

Kathleen rose, laughing.

"I have already accepted Joe's invitation," she said. "Good-night, Mr. Blair." She gave him her hand.

He held it as long as he dared, looking her straight in the eye.

"I'm not nearly as jealous of Joe as I was!"

She was gone through the curtains, a flash of dainty grace. Then her face reappeared.

"If you care to call again some time, Dad would love to read you those notes on the Battle of Wolverhampton!"

Blair looked round the room. The dog, lying by the fire, got up, stretched, and wagged his tail. Blair pulled out his watch. "Giminy!" he said, "I'd better go down and let those poor devils out of the cellar."

REFERRED TO THE AUTHOR



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**Y**ES, "Obedience" is a fine play. I'm glad they've revived it. Did you know that the first time it was produced, Morgan Edwards played the part of Dunbar? It's rather an odd story.

I never think of Edwards without remembering the dark, creaky stairs in that boarding-house on Seventy-third Street. That was where I first met him. We had a comical habit of always encountering on the stairs. We would pass with that rather ridiculous murmur and sidling obeisance of two people who don't know each other but want to be polite. I was interested in him at once. Even on the shadowy stairway I could see that he had a fine head, and there was something curiously attractive about his pale, preoccupied face. There was a touch of the unworldly about him, and a touch of the tragic, too. You know how you divine things about people. "He has troubles of his own" was the banal phrase that came into my mind. Also there was something queerly familiar

about him. I wondered if I had seen him before, or only imagined him. I was busy writing, at that time, and my mind was peopled with energetic phantoms. The thought struck me that perhaps he was someone I had invented for a story, but had never given life to. I wondered, was this pale and rather reproachful spectre going to haunt me until the tale was written? At any rate, whatever the story was, I had forgotten it.

One day, as I creaked up the first flight, I saw that he was standing at the head of the stairs, waiting for me to pass. A door was open behind him, and there was light enough to see him clearly. Tall, thin, beautifully shaven on a fine angular jaw that would not be easy to shave, I was surprised to see an air of sudden cheerfulness about him that was almost incongruous. Having thought of him only as a sort of melancholy hallucination living on a dingy stairway, it was quite startling to see him with his face lit up like a lyric poet's, a glow of mundane exhilaration in his eyes. For the first time in our meetings he looked as though to speak to him would not break in upon his secret thoughts. He was the kind of chap, you know, who usually looked as though he was busy thinking. I remember what I said because it was so inane. Some people don't like

to cross on the stairs. I looked up as I came to the turn in the steps, and said, "Superstitious?" He smiled and said "No, I guess not!" "Only in the literal sense, at this moment," I said. An absurd remark, and a horrible pun which I regretted at once, for I thought I would have to explain it. Nothing more humiliating than having to explain a bad pun. But if I didn't explain it, it would seem rude. He looked puzzled, then his face lit up charmingly. "Superstitious—standing above you, eh? I never thought of the meaning before!"

I came up the last steps. "Pardon the vile pun," I said. Then I knew where I had seen him before, and recognized him. "Aren't you Morgan Edwards?" I asked. "Yes," he said.

"I thought so. I remember you in 'After Dinner'. I wrote the notice in the *Observer*." "By Jove, did you? I *am* glad to meet you. I think that was the nicest thing any one ever said." His gaunt and pensive face showed a quick flash of that direct and honest friendliness which is so appealing. We found that we were both living on the fourth floor. For similar reasons, undoubtedly. I'm afraid he thought, at first, that I was a dramatic critic of standing. Afterward I explained that the "After Dinner" notice had been

only a fluke. I was on the *Observer* when the show was put on, and one of the dramatic men happened to be ill.

Wait a minute: give me a chance! I'll tell it exactly as it came to me, in snips and shreds. At first I didn't pay much attention. I had problems of my own that summer. You know what a fourth-floor hall bedroom is in hot weather. I had given up my newspaper job, and was trying to finish a novel. I couldn't work late at night, when it was cool, because if I kept my typewriter going after nine-thirty the old maid in the next room used to pound on the partition. I didn't get on very well with the work, and the money was running low. Every now and then I would meet Edwards in the hall. He looked ill and worried, and I used to think there was a touching pathos in his careful neatness. My own habits run the other way—my Palm Beach suit was a wreck, I remember—but Edwards was always immaculate. I could see—having made it my business to observe details—how cunningly he had mended his cuffs and soft collars. Poor devil! I used to see him going out about noon, with his cane and Panama hat. I dare say he scrubbed his hat with his toothbrush. Summer is a hard time for an actor who hasn't had a job

all spring. Of course there are the pictures, and summer stock, but I gathered that he had been ill, and then had turned down several offers of that sort on account of something coming along that he had great hopes for. I remembered his really outstanding work in "After Dinner", that satiric comedy that fell dead the winter before. Most of the critics gave it a good roasting, but knowing what I do now I expect the real trouble was poor direction. Fagan was the director, and what did he know of sophisticated comedy? As I say, I had reviewed the piece for the *Observer*, and had been greatly struck by Edwards's playing. Not a leading part, but exquisitely done.

But just at that time I was absorbed in my own not-too-successful affairs. For several years I had been saying to myself that I would do great stuff if I could only get away from the newspaper grind for a few months. And then, when I had saved up five hundred dollars, and buried myself there on Seventy-third Street to write, I couldn't seem to make any headway. I got half through the novel, and then saw that it was paltry stuff. It was flashy, spurious, and raw. One warm evening I was sitting at my window, smoking mournfully and watching some girls who were laughing and talking in a big apartment house that loomed over

our lodgings like an ocean liner beside a tugboat. There was a tap at the door. Edwards asked if he could come in. I was surprised, and pleased. He kept very much to himself.

"Glad to see you," I said. "Sit down and have a pipe."

"I didn't want to intrude," he said. "I just wanted to ask you something. You're a literary man. Do you know anything about Arthur Sampson?"

I had to confess that I had never heard the name. No one had, at that time, you remember.

"He's written a play," Edwards said. "A perfectly lovely piece of work. I've got a part in it. By heaven, it seems too good to be true—after a summer like this: illness, the actors' strike, and all that—to get into something so fine. I've just read the whole script. I'm so keen about it, I'm eager to know who the author is. I thought perhaps you might know something about him."

"I guess he's a new man," I said. "What's the play called?"

"'Obedience.' You know, I've never had such a stroke of luck—it's as if the part had been written for me."

"Splendid," I said, and I was honestly pleased to hear of his good fortune. "Is it the lead?"

"Oh, no. Of course they want a big name for that. Brooks is the man. My part is only the foil—provides the contrast, you know—on the payroll as well as on the stage." He laughed, a little cynically.

"Who's producing it?"

"Upton."

"You don't mean to tell me Upton's got anything good?" I knew little enough about theatrical matters, but even outsiders know Upton's sort of producing, which mostly consists of musical shows where an atrocious libretto is pulled through by an opulent chorus and plenty of eccentric dancing. "A chorus that outstrips them all" was one of his favourite advertising slogans.

"That's why I was wondering about the author, Sampson. This must be his first, or he'd never have given it to Upton. Or is Upton going to turn over a new leaf?"

"The only leaves Upton is likely to turn over are figleaves," I said, brutally. Upton's previous production had been called "The Figleaf Lady".

"That's the amazing part of it," said Edwards. "This thing is really exquisite. It is beautifully written: quiet, telling, nothing irrelevant, not a false note. What will happen to it in Upton's hands, God knows. But he seems enthusiastic.

He's a likable cutthroat: let's hope for the best. You're busy—forgive me for breaking in."

Well, of course some of you have seen "Obedience" since that time, and you know that what Edwards told me was true. The play *was* lovely; not even Upton could kill it altogether. It was Sampson's first. Have any of you read it in printed form? It reads as well as it plays. And the part that Edwards was cast for—Dunbar—is, to any competent spectator, the centre of the action. You remember the lead: the cold, hard, successful hypocrite; and then Dunbar, the blundering, kindly simpleton whose forlorn attempts to create happiness for all about him only succeed in bringing disaster to the one he loves best. It's a great picture of a fine mind and heart, a life of rich, generous possibilities, frittered and wasted and worn out by the needless petty obstinacies of destiny. And all the tragedy (this was the superb touch) because the wretched soul never had courage enough to be unkind. What was it St. Paul, or somebody, said about not being disobedient to the heavenly vision? Dunbar, in the play, was obedient enough, and his heavenly vision made his life a hell. It was the old question of conflicting loyalties. How are you going to solve that?

I suppose the tragic farce is the most perfect conception of man's mind—outside the higher mathematics, I dare say. Everyone knows Sampson's touch now, but it was new then. Some of his situations came pretty close to the nerve-roots. The pitiful absurdity of people in a crisis, exquisite human idiocy where one can't smile because grotesque tragedy is so close . . . those were the scenes that Upton's director thought needed "working up". But I'm getting ahead of my story.

Well, now, let me see. I'd better be a little chronological. It must have been September, because I know I took Labour Day off and went to Long Beach for a swim. I had just about come to the conclusion that my novel was worthless, and that I'd better get a job of some sort. At the far end of the boardwalk, you remember, there's a quiet hotel where one gets away from the crowd, and where you see quite nice-looking people. After I'd had my swim, I thought I'd stroll up that way and have supper there. It's not a cheap place, but I had been living on lunch-counter food all summer, and I felt I owed myself a little extravagance. I was on my way along the boardwalk, enjoying the cool, strong whiff that comes off the ocean toward sunset, when I saw Edwards, on the other side of the promenade,

walking with a girl. My eye caught his, and we raised our hats. I was going on, thinking that perhaps he wasn't so badly off as I had imagined, when to my surprise he ran after me. He looked very haggard and ill, and seemed embarrassed.

"Look here," he said, "it's frightfully awkward: I must have had my pocket picked somehow. I've lost my railroad tickets and everything. Could you possibly lend me enough to get back to town? I've got a lady with me, too."

I didn't need to count my money to know how much I had. It was just about five dollars, and, as you know, that doesn't go far at Long Beach. I told him how I stood. "I can give you enough for the railroad fares, and glad to," I said. "But how about supper?"

"Oh, we're not hungry," he said; "we had a big lunch." I knew this was probably bravado, but I liked him for saying it. While I was feeling in my pocket for some bills, and wondering how to pass them over to him unobtrusively, he said, "I'd like to introduce you to Miss Cunningham. We're going to be married in the autumn."

You may have seen Sylvia Cunningham? If so, you know how lovely she is. Not pretty but with the simple charm that beauty can't— Well, that's trite! She'll never be a great actress,

but in the rôle of Sylvia Cunningham she's perfect. I hate to call her slender—it's such an overworked word, but what other is there? Dark hair and clear, amberlucent brown eyes, and a slow, searching way of talking, as if she were really trying to put thought into speech. She, too, poor child, had had a bad summer, I guessed: there was a neat little mend in her glove. She was very friendly—I think Edwards must have told her about that *Observer* notice. I saw that they were both much humiliated at their mishap, and I judged that genial frankness would carry off the situation best.

"Life among the artists!" I said. "What are our assets?"

"I've got seventeen cents," said Edwards. It was a mark of fine breeding, I thought, that he did not insist upon saying how much it was that he had lost.

Miss Cunningham began to open her purse. "I have——"

"Nonsense!" I said. "What you have doesn't enter into the audit. In the vulgar phrase, your money's no good. I've got five dollars and a quarter. Now I suggest we go to Jamaica and get supper there, and then go back to town by trolley. It'll be an adventure."

Well, that was what we did, and very jolly it

was. You know how it is: artists and actors and manicure girls and newspapermen are accustomed to ups and downs of pocket; and when they have a misery in the right-hand trouser they make up for it in a spirit of genial comradeship. Jamaica is an entertaining place. In a little lunchroom, which I remembered from a time when I covered a story out that way, we had excellent ham and eggs, and a good talk.

As we sat in that little white-tiled restaurant, I couldn't help watching Edwards. I don't know how to make this plain to you, but our talk, which was cheerful enough, was the least important part of the occasion. Talk tells so little, anyway: most of it's a mere stumbling in an almost foreign tongue when it comes to expressing the inward pangs and certainties that make up life. I had a feeling, as I saw those two, that I was coming closer than ever before to something urgent and fundamental in the human riddle. I thought that I had never seen a man so completely in love. When he looked at her there was a sort of --well, a sort of possession upon him, an enthusiasm, in the true sense of that strange word. I thought to myself that Keats must have looked at Fanny Brawne in just that way. And --you know what writers are-- I must confess that my observation

of these two began to turn into "copy" in my mind. I was wondering whether they might not give me a hint for my stalled novel.

There are some engaged couples that make it a point of honour to be a bit off-hand and jocose when any one else is with them. Just to show, I suppose, how sure they are of each other. And somehow I had expected actors, to whom the outward gestures of passion are a mere professional accomplishment, to be a little blasé or polished in such matters. But there was a perfect candour and simplicity about them that touched me keenly. Their relation seemed a lovely thing. Too lovely, and too intense perhaps, to be entirely happy, I thought, for I could see in Edwards's face that his whole life and mind were wrapped up in it. I may have been fanciful, but at that time I was seeing the human panorama not for itself but as a reflection of my own amateurish scribblings. In my novel I had been working on the theory—not an original one, of course—that the essence of tragedy is fixing one's passion too deeply on anything in life. In other words, that happiness only comes to those who do not take life too seriously. Destiny, determined not to give up its secrets, always maims or destroys those who press it too closely. As we laughed and enjoyed our-

selves over our meal, I was wondering whether Edwards, with his strange air of honourable sorrow, was a proof of my doctrine.

Of course we talked about the new play. Edwards had persuaded Upton to give Miss Cunningham a place in the cast, and she was radiant about it. Her eyes were like pansies as she spoke of it. I remember one thing she said:

"Isn't it wonderful? Morgan and I are together again. You know how much it means to us, for if the show has a run we can get married this winter."

"This fall," Edwards amended.

"Morgan's part is fine," she went on, after a look at him that made even a hardened reporter feel that he had no right to be there. "It's really the big thing in the play for any one who can understand. It's just made for him."

She was thoughtful a moment, and then added: "It's *too much* made for him, that's the only trouble. You're living with him, Mr. Roberts. Don't let him take it too hard. He thinks of nothing else."

I made some jocular remark, I forget what. Edwards was silent for a minute. Then he said: "If you knew how I've longed for a part like that—a part that I could really lose myself in."

"I shouldn't care," I said, "to lose myself in a part. Suppose I couldn't find myself again when the time came?"

He turned to me earnestly.

"You're not an actor, Roberts, so perhaps you hardly understand what it means to find a play that's *real*—more real than everyday life. What I mean is this: everyday life is so damned haphazard, troubled by a thousand distractions and subject to every sort of cruel chance. We just fumble along and never know what's coming next. But in a play, a good play, it's all worked out beforehand, you can see the action progressing under clear guidance. What a relief it is to be able to sink yourself in your part, to live it and breathe it and get away for awhile from this pitiless self-consciousness that tags around with us. You remember what they used to say about Booth: that it wasn't Booth playing Hamlet, but Hamlet playing Booth."

The next day, I remember, I tied up my manuscript neatly in a brown paper parcel, marked it *Literary Remains of Leonard Roberts* (I was childish enough to think that the alliteration would please my literary executor, if there should be such a person), put it away in my trunk, and went down

to Park Row to see if there were any jobs to be had. Of course it was the usual story. I had been out of the game for six months, and Park Row seemed to have survived the blow with great courage. At the *Observer* office they charitably gave me some books to review. As I came uptown on the subway I was reflecting on the change a few hours had made in my condition. That morning I had been an author, a novelist if you please; and now I was not even a reporter, but that most deplorable of all Grub Street figures, a hack reviewer. It was mid-afternoon, and I hadn't had any lunch yet. In a fit of sulks I went into Browne's, sat down in a corner, and ordered a chop and some shandygaff. As I ate, I looked over the books with a peevish eye. Never mind, I said to myself, I will write such brilliant, withering, and scorching reviews that in six months the Authors' League will be offering me hush money. I was framing the opening paragraph of my first article when Johnson, whom I had known on the *Observer*, stopped at my table. He was one of the newspaper men who had left Park Row to go into professional publicity work. There had been a time when I sneered at such a declension.

"Hullo, Leonard," he said. "What are you doing nowadays?"

I told him, irritably, that I was writing a serial for one of the women's magazines. There is no statement that puts envious awe into a newspaper man so surely as that. But I also admitted that if he knew of a good job I might be persuaded to listen to details.

"As it happens," he said, "I do. Upton, the theatrical producer, is looking for a press agent. He tells me he's got something unusual under way, and he wants a highbrow blurb-artist. He says his regular roughneck is no good for this kind of show. Something by a new writer, rather out of Upton's ordinary line, I guess."

"Is it 'Obedience'?"

"That's it. I couldn't remember the name."

As soon as I had finished my lunch I went round to Upton's office. It was high up in a building overlooking Longacre Square, where the elevators were crowded with the people of that quaint and spurious world. The men I found particularly fascinating—you know the type, so very young in figure, often so old and hard and dry in face, with their lively tweeds, starched blue or green collars, silver-gray ties, and straight-brushed, purple-black hair. It was my first introduction to the realms of theatrical producing, and I must confess that I found Mr. Upton's office very enter-

taining with its air of elaborate and transparent bunkum. I sat underneath a coloured enlarged photo of the Garden of Eden ballet in "The Figleaf Lady" and surveyed the small anteroom. It was all intensely unreal. Those framed photographs, on which were scrawled *To Harry Upton, the Best of His Kind*, or some such inscriptions, and signed by dramatists I had never heard of; the typist pounding out contracts; the architect's drawing of the projected Upton Theatre at Broadway and Fiftieth Street, showing a line of people at the box office—all this, I knew by instinct, meant nothing. The dramatists whose photographs I saw would never write a real play; the Upton Theatre, even if it should be built, would not house anything but "burlettas," and the typed contracts were not worth so much carbon paper. As for Mr. Upton himself, one couldn't help loving him: he was such a disarming, enthusiastic, shrewd, unreliable bandit. To abbreviate, he took me on as a member of his "publicity staff" (consisting of myself and a typewriter, as far as I could see) at one hundred dollars a week. His private office had three ingenious exits; going out by one of them, I found myself in a little alcove with the typewriter and plenty of stationery. Rehearsals of "Obedience" had started that morn-

ing, Upton had told me; so before I went home that afternoon I had typed and sent off the following pregnant paragraph for the next day's papers:

Henry Upton's first dramatic production of the season, "Obedience," by Arthur Sampson, began making elbow room for itself at rehearsals yesterday. Keith Brooks will play the leading rôle, supported by Lillian Llewellyn, Sylvia Cunningham, Morgan Edwards, and other distinguished players.

I had a feeling of cheerfulness that evening. The cursed novel was no longer on my mind, there would be a hundred dollars due me the next week, and I was about to satisfy my long-standing curiosity to know something about the theatre from the inside. It was one of those typical evenings of New York loveliness: a rich, tawny, lingering light, a dry, clear air, warm enough to be pleasantly soft and yet with a sharp tingle in the breeze. I strolled about that bright jolly neighbourhood round the hideous Verdi statue, bought a volume of Pinero's plays at one of those combination book, cigar, and toy shops, and as I sat in my favourite Milwaukee Lunch I believe (if I must be frank) that some idea of writing a play was flitting through my mind. I got back to my room about ten o'clock. I had just sat down to read Pinero when Edwards tapped at

the door. My mouth was open to tell him my surprising news when I saw that he was unpleasantly agitated. First he insisted on returning my loan, although I begged him to believe that there need be no hurry about it.

"Rehearsals began to-day," he said. He sat down on the bed and looked very sombre. "The worst possible has happened," he said. "Fagan's directing."

I tried to console him. Perhaps I felt that if Upton had shown such good sense in his choice of a press representative his judgment in directors couldn't be altogether wrong.

"Oh, well," I said, "if the play's as good as you say, he can't hurt it much. Upton believes in it, he won't let Fagan chop it about, will he? And he's got a good cast—they won't need much direction: they know how to handle that kind of thing."

"It's plain you don't know the game," he said. "If Upton had combed Broadway from Herald Square to Reisenweber's, he couldn't have found a man so superbly equipped to kill the piece. As for poor Sampson, God help him. Fagan is a typical Broadway hanger-on, with plenty of debased cunning of his own; not a fool at all; but the last man for this kind of show, which needs imagination, atmosphere, delicate tone and tempo.

But that's not all of it. Fagan hates me personally. He'll get me out of the company if he possibly can. He can do it, of course: he has Upton's ear." He sat a moment, one eyebrow twitching nervously. Suddenly he cried out, in a quivering, passionate voice which horrified and frightened me:

"I've *got* to play Dunbar! It's my only chance. *Everything* depends upon it."

Such an outcry, in a man usually so trained a master of himself, was pitiful. I was truly shocked, and yet I was almost on the verge of nervous laughter, I remember, when the idiotic old spinster in the next room pounded lustily on the wall. I suppose she thought we were revelling. I could see that he needed to talk. I tried to soothe him with some commonplace words and a cigarette.

"No," he said, "I know what I'm talking about. Fagan hates me. No need to go into details. He directed 'After Dinner,' you know —and massacred it. We had a row then . . . he tried to bully a girl in the company . . . I threatened to thrash him. He hasn't forgotten, of course. He passed the word round then that I ruined the show. If this were any other play I'd have walked out as soon as I saw him. But

this piece is different. I—I've set my heart on it. My God, I'm just *meant* for that part——”

In the hope of calming him, I asked what had happened at the first rehearsal.

“Oh, the usual thing. We went through the first act, with the sides. I knew my lines perfectly, the only one who did (I ought to, I've been over them incessantly these few weeks—the thing haunts me). That seemed to annoy Fagan. Sampson was there—a quiet little man with a bright, thoughtful eye. For his benefit, evidently, Fagan got off his old tosh about Victor Hugo and the preface to ‘Hernani’. It's a bit of patter he picked up somewhere, and uses to impress people with. In the middle of it, he suddenly realized that I had heard it all before. That made him mad. So he cut it short, and reasserted himself by saying that the first act would have to be cut a great deal. Sampson looked pretty groggy, but said nothing. Sampson, I can see, is my only hope. Fagan will try to force me out of the show by hounding me until I lose my temper and quit. He began by telling me how to cross the stage. A man who learned the business under Frank Benson doesn't need to be taught how to walk!”

I ventured some mild sedative opinion, because

I saw it did him good to pour out his perplexity.

"You don't know," he said, "how the actor is at the mercy of the director. The director is appointed by the manager and is responsible only to him. If the director takes a dislike to one of the cast, he can tell the manager he 'can't work with him', and get him fired that way; or he can make the man's position impossible by ridicule and perpetual criticism at rehearsals. He remarked to-day that I was miscast. The fool! I've never had such a part."

Well, we talked until after midnight, and only stopped then because I was afraid that the spinster might begin to hammer again. In the end I got him fairly well pacified. He was delighted when I told him that I was going to be press agent, and I pleased him by making some memoranda of his previous career, which I thought I could work up into a Sunday story. To tell the truth, I did not, then, take all his distress at its face value. I knew he had had a difficult summer, and was in a nervous, high-strung state. I thought that his trouble was partly what we call "actors' disease," or (to put it more humanely) oversensitized self-consciousness. I promised to get round to the rehearsal the next day.

As a matter of fact, it was several days before I was able to attend a rehearsal. For the next morning Upton asked me to go to Atlantic City, where he had a musical show opening, to collect data for publicity. His regular press man was ill, and it was evident that he expected me to do plenty of work for my hundred a week. However, it was a new and amusing job, and I was keen to absorb as much local colour as possible. I went to Atlantic City on the train with the "Jazz You Like It" company, took notes of all their life histories, went in swimming with the Blandishing Blondes quartette that afternoon, had them photographed on the sand, took care to see that they were arrested in their one-piece suits, bailed them out, and by dinner-time had collected enough material to fill the trashiest Sunday paper. In the evening the show opened, and I saw what seemed to me the most appallingly vulgar and brutally silly spectacle that had ever disgraced a stage. I wondered how a company of quite intelligent and amusing people could ever have been drilled into such laborious and glittering stupidity. The gallery fell for the Blondes, but the rest of the house suffered for the most part in silence, and I expected to see Upton crushed to earth. When I met him in the lobby

afterward I was wondering how to condole with him. To my surprise he was radiant. "Well, I guess we've got a knockout," he said. "This'll sell to the roof on Broadway." He was right, too. Well, this is out of the story. I simply wanted to explain that I was away from New York for several days.

When I got back to Upton's office I was busy most of the day sending out stuff to the papers. Then I asked the imperial young lady who was alternately typing letters and attending to the little telephone switchboard, where "Obedience" was rehearsing. At the Stratford, she replied. Wondering how many of Mr. Upton's amusing and discreditable problems were bestowed under her magnificent rippling coiffure (she was really a stunning creature), I went round to that theatre. The middle door was open and I slipped in. The house was dark, on the tall, naked stage the rehearsal was proceeding. It was my first experience of this sort of thing, and I found it extremely interesting. The stage was set out with chairs to indicate exits and essentials of furniture; at the back hung a huge canvas sea-scene, used in some revue that had opened at the Stratford the night before. The electricians were tinkering with their illuminating effects, great blazes and shafts of

light criss-crossed about the place as the rehearsal went on, much to the annoyance of the actors. Little electric stars winked in the painted sky portion of the blue back-drop, and men in overalls walked about gazing at their tasks.

I sat down quietly in the gloom, about half-way down the middle aisle. Two or three other people, whose identity I could not conjecture, sat singly down toward the front. In the orchestra row, in shirtsleeves, with his feet on the brass rail and a cigar in his mouth, sat a person who, I saw, must be the renowned Fagan. Down-stage were Brooks, Edwards, and a charming creature in summery costume who was obviously the original of the multitudinous photographs of Lillian Llewellyn. The rest of the company were sitting about at the back, off the scene. Edwards, who was very pale in the violent down-pour of a huge bulb hanging from a wire just overhead, was speaking as I took my seat.

"Wait a minute, folks—*wait a minute!*" cried Fagan, sharply. "Now! You've got your situation planted, let's nail it to the cross. Mr. Edwards!"

The actors turned, wearily, and Miss Llewellyn sat down on a chair. Brooks stood waiting with a kind of dogged endurance. At the back of the

stage a workman was hammering on a piece of metal. Fagan pulled his legs off the rail and climbed halfway up the little steps leading from the orchestra pit to the proscenium.

"Mr. Edwards!" he shouted, "you're letting it drop. It's dead. Give it to Mr. Brooks so he can pick it up and do something with it. You've got to lift it into the domain of comedy! My God!" he cried, throwing his cigar stub into the orchestra well, "that whole act is terrible. Take it again from Miss Llewellyn's entrance. Mr. Edwards, try to put a little more stuff into it. This isn't amateur theatricals."

Edwards turned as though about to speak, but he clenched his fist and kept silent. Brooks, however, was less patient.

"Pardon me, Mr. Fagan," he said, in a clear, ironical tone. "But I should like to ask a question, if you will allow me. You speak, very forcibly, of lifting it into the domain of comedy. That seems a curious phrase for this scene. Is it intended to be comic? If so, I must have misconstrued the author's directions in the script."

Brooks was too well-known a performer for Fagan to bully. Brooks was "on the lights"—in other words, when the show's electric signboard went up, it would carry his name. Around his

presence hung the mystic aura of five hundred dollars a week, quite enough in itself to make Fagan respectful. The director seemed a little startled by the star's caustic accent. As a matter of fact, I don't suppose he had ever read the script as a whole. I remembered that after the first rehearsal Edwards told me that Fagan had admitted not having read the play. He said he preferred to "pick up the dialogue as they went along". This reference to the author must have seemed to him unaccountably eccentric. I daresay he had forgotten that there was such a person.

He threw up his hands in mock surrender. "All right, all right, if that's the way you take it, I've got nothing to say. Play it your own way, folks. Mr. Edwards, you're killing Mr. Brooks's scene there. Give him time to come down and get his effect."

Again I saw Edwards lift his head as though about to retort, but Brooks whispered something to him. Fagan came back to his seat in the front row and lit a fresh cigar. "Take it from Miss Llewellyn's first entrance," he shouted.

Miss Cunningham and a third man came forward and the five regrouped themselves. The rehearsal resumed. I watched with a curious tingle of excitement. The dialogue meant little

to me, plunging in at the middle of the act, but I could not miss the passionate quality of Edwards's playing. Even Brooks, a polished but very cold actor, caught the warmth. Their speeches had the rich vibrance of anger. I was really startled at the power and velocity of the performance, considering that they had only rehearsed a week. As I watched, someone leaned over my shoulder from behind and whispered: "What do you think of Dunbar?"

My eyes had grown accustomed to the gloom. I turned and saw a little man with a thin face and lifted eyebrows which gave him a quaint expression of perpetual surprise. I was so absorbed in the scene that at first I hardly understood.

"Dunbar—? Oh, Edwards?" I whispered. "I think he's corking—fine."

At that moment Edwards was in the middle of a speech. Miss Cunningham had just said something. Edwards, going toward her, had put his hand on her shoulder and was replying in a tone of peculiar tenderness. Fagan's loud voice broke in.

"Dunbar! Mr. Edwards! I can't let you do it like that. You make me hold up this scene every time. Now get it right. This is a bit of comedy, not sob stuff. Try to be a bit facetious.

if you can. You're not making love to the girl—not yet!"

There was a moment of silence. Those on the stage stood still, oddly like children halted in the middle of a game. I don't suppose Fagan's words were deliberately intended as a personal insult, but seemed to himself a legitimate comment on the action of the piece. I think his offences came more often from boorish obtuseness than calculated malice. But the brutal interruption, coming after a long and difficult afternoon, strained the players' nerves to snapping. Brooks sat down with an air of calculated nonchalance and took out a cigarette. Then a tinkling hammering began again somewhere up in the flies. Edwards was flushed.

"For God's sake stop that infernal racket up there," he cried. Then, coming down to the unlit gutter of footlights, he said quietly:

"Mr. Fagan, I've studied this part rather more carefully than you have. If the author is in the house, I'd like to appeal to him as to whether my conception is correct."

There was such a quiver of passion in his voice that even Fagan seemed taken aback.

"What's got into you folks to-day?" he growled. "Oh, very well. Is Mr. Sampson here?"

The little man behind me got up and walked down the aisle in an embarrassed way.

"Mr. Author," said Fagan, "have you been watching the rehearsal?"

Sampson murmured something.

"Is Mr. Edwards doing the part as you want it done?"

"Mr. Edwards is perfectly right," said Sampson.

"Thank you, sir," said Edwards from the stage. "Fagan, when you are ready to conduct rehearsals like a gentleman, I will be here." He turned and walked off the stage.

Brooks snapped his cigarette case to, and the sharp click seemed to bring the scene to an end. Fagan picked up his coat from the seat beside him. "Bolshevism!" he said. "All right, folks, ten o'clock to-morrow, here. Miss Cunningham, will you tell Mr. Edwards ten o'clock to-morrow?"

This last might be taken either as a surly apology, or as an added insult. Rather subtle for Fagan, I thought. As I was getting out of my seat, the director and a venomous-looking young man whom I had seen in and out of Upton's office walked up the aisle together. Sampson was just behind them. I could see that the director was

either furiously angry, or else (more likely) deemed it his duty to pretend to be.

"This show's no good as long as Edwards is in it," he said, loudly, spitting out fragments of cigar-wrapper. "That fellow's breaking up the company. I sha'n't be able to handle 'em at all, pretty soon. This kind of thing puts an omen on a show."

Well, that was my introduction to "Obedience". I watched Fagan and the hanger-on of Upton's office—one of those innumerable black-haired young infidels who run errands for a man like Upton, hobnob with the ticket speculators in the enigmatic argot of the box office, and seem to look out upon the world from behind a little grill of brass railings. They moved up the velvet slope of the passage, arguing hoarsely. Sampson faded gently away into the darkness and disappeared through the thick blue curtains of the foyer. An idea struck me, and I ran behind to see the stage manager, Cervaux, who was playing one of the minor parts. I cajoled his own copy of the script away from him, promising to return it to the office the next morning. I wanted to read the play entire. Going out toward the stage door, behind a big flat of scenery I came upon Miss

Cunningham. She was sitting in a rolling chair, one of those things you see on the boardwalk at Atlantic City. There was a whole fleet of them drawn up in the wings, they were used in that idiotic revue playing at the Stratford. It added to the curiously unreal atmosphere of the occasion to see her crouching there, crying, alone in the half light, among those absurd vehicles of joy.

I intended to pass as though I hadn't seen her, but she called out to me. If Upton could have seen her then, her honey-brown eyes glazed with tears, black rings in her poor little pale face, he would have raised her salary—or else fired her, I don't know which.

"Mr. Roberts," she said, slowly and tremulously—"I don't know who else to ask. Will you try to help Morgan?"

"Why of course," I said. "Anything I can do——"

"You were at the rehearsal? Then you saw how Fagan treats him. It's been like that every day. The brute! It's abominable! You know how we had set our hearts on playing this together, Morgan and I. . . . Now I've almost come to pray that Morgan will throw it up. That's what Fagan wants, of course, but I don't care. All I want is his happiness. I said something to him

about giving up the part, but he . . . Mr. Roberts, I'm *worried*. I've never seen Morgan so strange before. He's not himself. I don't know what's the matter, I have a feeling that something——"

The electricians were still fooling about with their spotlights, and a great arrow of brilliance sliced across the stage and groped about us. It blazed brutally upon her tear-stained face, and then see-sawed among the little flock of rolling chairs. It was that shaft of light that dispelled, once for all, the feeling I had had that this was all some sort of theatrical gibberish, pantomime stuff intended to impress the greenhorn press agent. For when she recoiled under the blow of that sudden stroke of brightness I could read unquestionable trouble on her face. There was not only perplexity, there was fear.

She was silent, turning her face away. Then she stepped down from the chair, in a blind sort of way.

"I begged him to give it up," she said, quietly. "He said that no one but the author could take him out of this part. I wish the author would.—Oh, I don't know what to wish! Morgan's making himself ill fighting against Fagan."

We walked across Fortieth Street together,

and I escorted her as far as a Fifth Avenue bus. As we waited for the bus she said:

"You'll probably see him to-night. Tell him about rehearsal to-morrow, ten o'clock. He had gone before I could speak to him. You see, he's not himself. We were to have taken supper together."

She added something that I have never forgotten:

"The worst tragedy in the world is when lovely things get in the hands of people who don't understand them. If you see Mr. Sampson, you might tell him that. Some day he may write another play."

When I got up to Seventy-third Street I tapped at Edwards's door. He was at his table, writing. I had intended to ask him to take dinner with me, thinking that perhaps I could help him, but his manner showed plainly that he wanted to be alone. If I had been an old friend of his, perhaps I could have done something; but I did not feel I knew him well enough to force myself upon his mood.

"Fagan sent you word, rehearsal to-morrow at ten," I said. "It sounds to me like an apology."

He looked at me steadily.

"You were there to-day? You will understand a little, then."

"I understand that Fagan is a ruffian."

"Fagan—Oh, I don't mean Fagan." He paused and looked at the wet point of his pen. "I was just writing a note to Sampson," he said. He hesitated a moment, and then tore the written sheet across several times and dropped it in the basket.

"Oh, hell," he said. "I can't appeal to Sampson again. I'll have to work it out myself.—Don't imagine I take Fagan too seriously. Fagan is only an accident. A tragic accident. That's part of my weird, as the Scotch say. I mean, you'll understand better about Dunbar."

I didn't quite understand, and said nothing.

"I wouldn't let a man like Fagan stand between me and Dunbar," he said. "It's in the hands of the author now. You heard what he said. He put Dunbar into the play, he's the only one who can take him out of it."

The next morning Upton broke the news to me that I was to go out as advance man. The opening was set for Providence, only ten days later. There was to be a two-weeks' tour of three-night engagements, and I had to arrange for the publicity, poster-printing, accommodations for the company, and so on. This did not appeal to me very strongly, but I scrambled together a

lot of photographs, interviewed the cast as to their preferences in hotel rooms, and set off. I got back a week later. We were then only three days away from the opening. They were rehearsing with the sets, Upton's telephone blonde told me, and I hurried round to the Stratford to see how the scenic artist had done the job.

They had just knocked off for lunch when I got there, and at the stage door I met Edwards coming out with Miss Cunningham. He looked very white and tired.

"Hullo," I said; "just in time to have lunch with me! Come on, we'll go to Maxim's. I've still got some of Upton's expense money."

"I've got to rush round to the modiste for a fitting," said Miss Cunningham. "The gowns are just finished. You take Morgan and give him a good talking-to. He needs it." I did not quite understand the appeal in her eyes, but I saw that she wanted me to talk with Edwards alone. She went toward Bryant Park, and we turned down to Thirty-eighth. Edwards stood a moment at the corner looking after her.

"Sylvia says I'm a fool," he said, wearily. "I don't know: most of us are, one way or another.—You know I told you that I put my confidence in the author."

"Quite right," I said. "I myself heard Sampson say he thought you were corking."

"Well, I wonder if he's double-crossing me?" said Edwards, slowly, as though to himself.

"In what way?"

"Yesterday, when I was coming down to rehearsal, there was a tie-up of some kind on the subway. The train stood still for a long time, and then the lights went out. We stayed in the dark for I don't know how long—everybody got nervous. It was pitch black, and awfully hot and stuffy. The women began to scream. I felt pretty queer myself—you know I haven't been well—and as we sat there I went off into a kind of doze or something. Then, just as everybody was on the edge of a panic, the lights came on and we went ahead. When we got to Times Square I think I must have been a bit off colour, for the damned rehearsal went out of my head entirely. Suddenly I realized I was in a drugstore drinking some headache fizz when I was over an hour late at the theatre. My God! I hustled down there as fast as I could go. Queer thing. I went in through the stage door, and as I came round behind the set I heard voices on the stage. They were rehearsing, of course. Naturally, they couldn't wait all morning for me. But this

is what I'm getting at. You know that scene in the second act where I say to Brooks:

*It's all very well for you to say that. Ah, hah!  
I see! But suppose you had been in my place——*

"You know that's a turning point in the act. There's a particular inflection I give that speech—the way I say the 'Ah, hah! I see!' that makes the point clear to the audience and gets it over. Well, they were rehearsing that scene, and from behind the canvas I heard that speech. And what I heard was *my own voice*."

"What on earth do you mean?" I said.

He hesitated. He was sitting, his lunch almost untasted, with one elbow on the table and his forehead leaning on his hand. Under his long, sinewy fingers I could see his brows tightened and frowning downward upon his plate.

"Exactly what I say. It was my own voice. Or, if you prefer, Dunbar's voice. I heard that speech uttered, tone for tone, as I had been saying it. It was the precise accent and pitch of ironical comment which I had thought appropriate for Dunbar at that point in the action. The sudden change of tone, the pause, the placing of the emphasis—the words were just as if they had come out of my own mouth. I stopped, instinctively.

I said to myself, has Fagan got someone else to play the part, and been coaching him on the side? Someone who's been sitting in at rehearsals and has picked up my conception of Dunbar? And at that moment I heard Fagan sing out 'All right, folks, the carpenter wants to work on this set. We'll quit until after lunch.'

"I tell you, I was staggered. If I was out, I was out, but they might have been straight with me. It was a matter for the Equity, I thought. I didn't want to chin it over with the others just then, and I heard them coming off, so I slipped through the door that opens into the passage behind the stage box. I meant to tell Fagan what I thought about it. There was Sampson sitting in one of the boxes. He saw me, and got up. He said: 'By Jove, Mr. Edwards, you were fine this morning. I've never seen you do it so well. It was bully, all through. Keep it like that, and you're the hit of the play.'

"I thought at first he was making fun of me. I was about to make some sarcastic retort, when he put out his hand in the friendliest way, and said:

"'I want to thank you for what you're doing for that part, and I know it hasn't been easy. I've never seen anything so beautifully done, and

just want to tell you that if the play is a success it will be largely due to you.'

"This, on the heels of the other, astounded me so that I didn't know what to say. I made some automatic reply, and he left. I sat down in the cool darkness of the box to rest, for I was feeling very seedy. My head went round and round—touch of the sun, I dare say, or that foul air in the crowded subway car. I was still there when they came back, an hour later, for the afternoon rehearsal. I tried to talk to Sylvia about it, but all she would say was that I ought to go to a doctor."

"I think she's right," I said. "Look here, have you had any sleep lately?"

"You seem to have forgotten Dunbar's line," he said. "*There'll be plenty of time to sleep by and bye.*"

"For God's sake forget about Dunbar," I said. "Man, dear, you're on the tip of a nervous breakdown. Now listen. This is Friday. Dress rehearsal to-morrow. Sunday you'll have all day off. Take Miss Cunningham and go away into the country somewhere and rest. Put the damned play out of your mind and give her a good time. You both need it."

I didn't see him again until Monday morning.

I went up to Providence on the train with the company. As I passed through one of the Pullmans looking for a seat in a smoking compartment, I found Miss Cunningham and Edwards sitting in adjoining chairs. To my delight, they seemed very cheerful, and smiled up at me charmingly.

"Took your advice yesterday," he said. "We went down to Long Beach again. Had a lovely day, not even a pickpocket to spoil it."

"What an unfortunate remark!" said Sylvia, laughing. "He means, not a pickpocket to bring us a friend in need and give us a jolly evening in Jamaica."

"I spoke the speech trippingly," he admitted.

"And we left Dunbar behind!" said Sylvia. She flashed me a grateful little look that showed she knew I had tried to help.

"Have you decided where to spend the honeymoon?" I asked, greatly pleased to see them so happy.

"Hush!" she said. "We'll wait till we see what sort of notices the show gets."

"Think of the poor press agent. I've used up all my dope. Get spliced while we're in Providence and it'll give me a nice little story. You know the kind of thing—'CRITICS' PRAISE BRINGS PAIR TO ALTAR; PRESS CLIPPINGS CUPID'S AID'."

"You're getting as vulgar as a regular press agent," she said, merrily. "They don't think of anything except in terms of good stories for the paper."

"Oh," I said, "the press agent has his tragedies, too. Think how many stories he knows that he can't tell."

I felt that this remark was not very happily inspired, and went on through the car calling myself a clumsy idiot. In the smoking compartment, as luck would have it, were both Upton and Fagan, smoking huge cigars and talking together. I sat down and lit my pipe. Fagan, in his usual way, was trying to impress Upton with his own sagacity. There was another musical horror of Upton's scheduled to begin rehearsal shortly, and probably Fagan was hoping to land the job as director.

"What did you think of Edwards at the dress rehearsal?" said Fagan.

Upton grunted. He had a way of retaining his ideas until others had committed themselves.

"I've been telling you right along, he's impossible," said Fagan. "No one can work with him. He's too damned upstage. Now I got Billy Mitford to promise he'd run up and see the opening. Billy is the man you need for that part.

I had him in at the dress, and he'll be there to-night. I've given him a line on the part, and if Edwards falls down we can start rehearsing Billy right away. He could get set in a week, and open with the show in New York."

"Four hundred a week," was Upton's comment, seemingly addressed to the end of his cigar.

"All right, he's worth it. He's got a following. This guy Edwards is dear at any price. He'll kill the show. He doesn't get his stuff over. God knows I've worked on him. And he crabs Brooks's work more'n half the time. What you want is one of these birds that gets the women climbing over the orchestra rail. Billy is your one best bet, take it from me."

"Well, we'll open her up and see what we got," said Upton. "Is Sampson along?"

"No. Scared. Said he was too nervous to come. He'll learn to write a play afterwhile. What a mess that script was until I got her straightened out."

When we got to Providence I had several jobs to do around town. I visited the newspaper offices, stopped in at the theatre where the stage crew were busy unloading scenery, and when I returned to the hotel I lay down in my room and had a good nap. I was awakened late in the

afternoon—about five o'clock, because I looked at my watch—by a knocking at the door. I got up and opened. It was Edwards. To my dismay, his cheerfulness had vanished. He had gone back to the old pallid and anxious mood.

"Nervous, old man?" I said. When I had booked the rooms for the company I had arranged that he and I should be next door to each other, so that I could keep an eye on him.

"Nervous?" he said. "I'm ill. Had another of those damned swimming spells in my head. Haven't got any brandy, have you?"

I hadn't, but offered to go in search of some. He wouldn't let me.

"Don't go," he said. "Look here, I saw Mitford in the lobby just now. What the devil is he doing here?"

"Perhaps there's some other show on," I suggested, miserably.

"I told you they were trying to double-cross me," he said. "I know perfectly well what he's here for. Fagan is trying to razz me into a breakdown. Then he'll put Mitford in as Dunbar. But I tell you, I'll play this thing in spite of hell and high water."

He paced feverishly up and down, and I tried to ease his mind.

"By God, they sha'n't!" he cried. "I'll put this thing up to the author. Where's Sampson?"

"He's not here. For heaven's sake, man, don't get in a state. Everything's all right."

"Everything's all right!" he repeated, bitterly. "Yes, everything's lovely. Let's 'lift it into the domain of comedy'. But if you see Fagan, tell him to keep away from me."

I begged him to rest until dinner-time. I went into his room with him, made him lie down on the bed, rang for a bottle of ice water, and left him there. Then I went downstairs and wrote a couple of letters. I was just leaving the hotel when I met Fagan coming in. He stopped me to ask if I had taken care to put his name on the playbill as director. I had. If the show was a flop, I at least wanted his name attached as a participial cause.

I wandered uneasily about the busy streets until theatre time. I couldn't have been more nervous if I had been going on the boards myself. I spent part of the time prowling about trying to see how much "Obedience" paper I could find on the billboards and in shop windows. I stopped in at a lunchroom and had some supper. The place reminded me of the little café in Jamaica where Sylvia and Edwards and I had eaten together.

My mind was full of the picture of the two, and his face as he leaned across the table toward her. I thought that I had never seen a couple who so deserved happiness, or who had fought harder to earn it. What was the subtle appeal in this play that made it react so strangely upon him? The tragedy of Dunbar in the piece, the sacrifice of the poor, well-meaning fellow whose virtue always seemed to turn and rend him, did this echo some secret experience in his own life? I wondered whether an actor's career was really the gay business I had conceived it. It occurred to me that perhaps the actor's profession is doomed to suffering, because it takes the most dangerous explosives in life and plays with them. Love, ambition, jealousy, hatred, those are the things actors deal with. You can't play with those without one of them going off every now and then. They go off with a bang, and somebody gets hurt.

I suppose I'm sentimental. I wanted those two to win out. It seemed to me that a defeat for their fine and honourable passion would be a defeat for Love everywhere, and for all who believe in the worthy aspirations of the heart. I don't suppose any press agent ever pondered more generous philosophies than I did that night, over my lunch-counter supper.

Time went so fast that it was after eight when I got to the theatre. I went in and took a seat in the last row. The house, to my surprise, was crowded. I could see Upton's big bald head, well down in front, beside a massively carved lady, all bust and beads, whom I supposed to be Mrs. Upton. The élite of Providence were out in force, for Brooks's name is always a drawing card. Some of them, I feared, were going to be disappointed. It is all very well to introduce a new Barrie or a new Pinero to the playgoing public, but you've got to remember that it is bound to be grievous for those who prefer the other sort of thing.

The curtain, of course, was late, and I gave a sigh of relief when I saw it go up. Edwards, waiting carefully for the hush, had the house with him in three speeches. I have never seen better work, before or since. It was noticeable that at his first exit he got a bigger hand than Brooks at his carefully prepared entrance. The only thing that seemed to me out of the way was his extreme pallor. The silly ass, I said to myself, he hasn't made himself up properly. Then it struck me that it was probably a sound touch of realism, for certainly Dunbar would not be described as a full-blooded creature. I had read

the play carefully, and had seen it in rehearsal; but I had never known how much there was in it. Strangely enough, Edwards was the only one who showed no trace of nervousness. All the others, even Brooks, seemed unaccountably at a loss now and then, trampled on their lines, and smothered their points. At first the house was inclined to applaud, but as the action tightened, they hushed into the perfect and passionate silence that is the playwright's dream. There were six curtains at the end of the first act. I could tell by the tilt of old Upton's pink pate that he was in fine spirits. I looked about for Fagan in the lobby, as I was keen to see how he was taking it, but missed him in the arguing and shifting crowd.

By the time the third act was under way it was plain that we had a sure-fire success. Novice as I was, I could read the signs when I saw Upton scribbling telegrams at the box-office window in the second intermission, and observed the face of Mr. Mitford. The usual slips that always happen on first nights were there, of course. In the third act, when Edwards had to take Sylvia in his arms, she seemed to trip and almost fell; and I noticed that Brooks crossed the stage and helped her off, which was not in the script; but

these things were not marked by most of the audience. Dunbar, you remember, makes his final exit several minutes before the end of the third act. When he went off there was a little stir among the audience—far more eloquent than applause would have been. That beautiful delineation of a blundering high-minded failure had made its appeal.

After Edwards's last exit I felt my way out, quietly, and went round through the street and up the alley to the stage door. I wanted to be the first to congratulate him on his splendid triumph. I did not want to break in too soon, so I waited near the door until I heard the crash of hands that followed the curtain. The canvas rose and fell repeatedly as the players took their calls, while the house shook with applause. From where I stood, by the switches and buttons on the control board, I could see them lined up in the orange glare of the gutter, bowing and smiling. There were cries of "Dunbar! Dunbar!" and a rumbling of feet in the gallery. It is the only time I have ever seen an audience crowd down the aisles and stand by the orchestra rail, applauding. Then I saw why they lingered. Edwards had not taken his call.

The curtain fell again, and Cervaux, the stage

manager, came running off, the perspiration streaming down over his grease-paint.

"Christ!" he cried. "Where's that fool Edwards?"

As soon as the curtain finally shut off the house I could see the actors turn to each other as though in dismay. Miss Cunningham came off, and I ran to shake her hand. To my amazement she looked at me blankly, with a dreadful face, and sat down on a trunk.

Brooks strode across the stage. "Where's Edwards?" he shouted, angrily. "Tell him to take this call with me, the house is crazy."

"Where's the author?" said someone. "They want the author, too."

Several hurried upstairs to the men's dressing rooms, and I followed. The door of number 3, on which Edwards's name was scrawled in chalk, stood open. Cervaux stood stupidly on the sill. The room was empty.

"He's gone," said Cervaux. "What do you know about that?"

We could still hear the tumult of the house.

"Take the curtain, Mr. Brooks," said Cervaux. "Tell them he's ill."

I looked round number 3 dressing room.

There was a taxi standing outside the stage

door. I don't know how it happened to be there, or who had ordered it, but I shouted to the driver and jumped in. I have a faint impression that just as the engine started Sylvia appeared at the door, with a cloak thrown over her stage gown, and cried something, but I am not sure.

When I got to the hotel, the door of the room next to mine was locked, but the house detective got it open without any noise. There were two men in the room. In the far corner lay Fagan, unconscious, with a broken jaw, one arm hideously twisted under him, and a shattered water bottle beside his bloody head. Sprawled against the bed, kneeling, with his arms flung out across the counterpane, was Edwards.—The doctor said it was heart disease. He had been dead since six o'clock.

## THUNDER ON THE LEFT



TO  
S. A. E.



The undertaking a comedy not merely sentimental was very dangerous.

—OLIVER GOLDSMITH.

On parla des passions. “Ah! qu’elles sont funestes!” disait Zadig.—“Ce sont les vents qui enflent les voiles du vaisseau,” repartit l’ermite: “elles le submergent quelquefois; mais sans elles il ne pourrait voguer. La bile rend colère et malade; mais sans la bile l’homme ne saurait vivre. Tout est dangereux ici-bas, et tout est nécessaire.”

—VOLTAIRE, *Zadig*.

“Your mind had to be tormented and fevered and exalted before you could see a god.”

“It was cruel of you to do this,” she said.

—JAMES STEPHENS,  
*In the Land of Youth*.



## THUNDER ON THE LEFT



# Thunder on the Left

## I

**N**OW that the children were getting big, it wasn't to be called the Nursery any longer. In fact, it was being repapered that very day: the old scribbled Mother Goose pattern had already been covered with new strips, damp and bitter-smelling. But Martin thought he would be able to remember the gay fairy-tale figures, even under the bright fresh paper. There were three bobtailed mice, dancing. They were repeated several times in the procession of pictures that ran round the wall. How often he had studied them as he lay in bed waiting for it to be time to get up. It must be excellent to be Grown Up and able to dress as early as you please. What a golden light lies across the garden those summer mornings.

At any rate, it would be comforting to know that the bobtailed mice were still there, underneath. To-day the smell of the paste and new

paper was all through the house. The men were to have come last week. To-day it was awkward: it was Martin's birthday (he was ten) and he and Bunny had been told to invite some friends for a small party. It was raining, too: one of those steady drumming rains that make a house so cosy. The Grown Ups were having tea on the veranda, so the party was in the dining room. When Mrs. Richmond looked through the glass porch doors to see how they were getting on, she was surprised to find no one visible.

"Where on earth have those children gone?" she exclaimed. "How delightfully quiet they are."

There was a seven-voiced halloo of triumph, and a great scuffle and movement under the big mahogany table. Several steamer rugs had been pinned together and draped across the board so that they hung down forming a kind of pavilion. From this concealment the children came scrambling and surrounded her in a lively group.

"We had all disappeared!" said Bunny. She was really called Eileen, but she was soft and plump and brown-eyed and twitch-nosed; three years younger than her brother.

"You came just in time to save us," said Martin gaily.

"Just in time to save my table," amended Mrs.

Richmond. "Bunny, you know how you cried when you scratched your legs going blackberrying. Do you suppose the table likes having its legs scratched any better than you do? And those grimy old rugs all over my lace cloth. Martin, take them off at once."

"We were playing Stern Parents," explained Alec, a cousin and less awed by reproof than the other guests, who were merely friends.

Mrs. Richmond was taken aback. "What a queer name for a game."

"It's a lovely game," said Ruth, her face pink with excitement. "You pretend to be Parents and you all get together and talk about the terrible time you have with your children——"

Martin broke in: "And you tell each other all the things you've had to scold them for——"

"And you have to forbid their doing all kinds of things," said Ben.

"And speak to them Very Seriously," chirped Bunny. Mrs. Richmond felt a twinge of merri-ment at the echo of this familiar phrase.

"And every time you've punished them for something that doesn't really matter——" (this was Phyllis)

"—You're a *Stern Parent*, and have to disappear!" cried Martin.

"You get under the table and can't come out until someone says something nice about you."

"It's a very instructing game, 'cause you have to know just how far children can be allowed to go——"

"But we were *all* Stern Parents, and had all disappeared."

"Yes, and then Mother said we were delightfully quiet, and that saved us."

"What an extraordinary game," said Mrs. Richmond.

"All Martin's games are extraordinary," said Phyllis. "He just made up one called Quarrelsome Children."

"Will you play it with us?" asked Bunny.

"I don't believe that's a new game," said her mother. "I'm sure I've seen it played, too often. But it's time for the cake. Straighten up the chairs and I'll go and get it."

Seated round the table, and left alone with the cake, the lighted candles, and the ice cream, the children found much to discuss.

"Ten candles," said Alec, counting them carefully.

"I had thirteen on mine, last birthday," said Phyllis, the oldest of the girls.

"That's nothing, so did I," said Ben.

"Your cook's clever," said Ruth. "She's marked the places to cut, with icing, so you can make all the pieces even."

"I think it was foolish of her," said Martin, "because Bunny is quite a small child still; if she has too much chocolate she comes out in spots."

Bunny and Joyce, at the other end of the table, looked at each other fleetingly, in a tacit alliance of juniority. Joyce was also seven, a dark little elf, rather silent.

"Why don't you blow out the candles?" shrilled Bunny.

This effectively altered the topic. After the sudden hurricane had ceased, Martin began to cut, obediently following the white spokes of sugar.

"I wonder what it feels like to be grown up?" said Alec.

"I guess we'll know if we wait long enough," said Phyllis.

"How old do you have to be, to be grown up?" asked Ruth.

"A man's grown up when he's twenty-one," Ben stated firmly.

"Is Daddy twenty-one?" said Bunny.

Cries of scorn answered this. "Of course he is," said Martin. "Daddy's middle-age, he's

over thirty. He's what they call *primeoflife*, I heard him say so."

"That's just before your hair begins to come out in the comb," said Alec.

Bunny was undismayed, perhaps encouraged by seeing in front of her more ice cream than she had ever been left alone with before.

"Daddy *isn't* grown up," she insisted. "The other day when we played blind man's buff on the beach, Mother said he was just a big boy."

"Girls grow up quicker," said Phyllis. "My sister's eighteen, she's so grown up she'll hardly speak to me. It happened all at once. She went for a week-end party, when she came back she was grown up."

"That's not grown up," said Ben. "That's just stuck up. Girls get like that. It's a form of nervousness."

They were not aware that Ben had picked up this phrase by overhearing it applied to some eccentricities of his own. They were impressed, and for a moment the ice cream and cake engaged all attentions. Then a round of laughter from the veranda reopened the topic.

"Why do men laugh more than ladies?" asked Bunny.

"It must be wonderful," said Martin.

"You bet!" said Ben. "Think of having long trousers, and smoking a pipe, blowing rings, going to town every day, going to the bank and getting money——"

"And all the drug stores where you can stop and have sodas," said Ruth.

"Sailing a boat!"

"Going shopping!"

"The circus!" shouted Bunny.

"I don't mean just *doing* things," said Martin. "I mean thinking things." His eager face, clearly lit by two candles in tall silver sticks, was suddenly and charmingly grave. "Able to think what you want to; not to have to—to do things you know are wrong." For an instant the boy seemed to tremble on the edge of uttering the whole secret infamy of childhood; the most pitiable of earth's slaveries; perhaps the only one that can never be dissolved. But the others hardly understood; nor did he, himself. He covered his embarrassment by grabbing at a cracker of gilt paper in which Alec was rummaging for the pull.

Joyce had slipped from her chair and was peeping through one of the windows. Something in the talk had struck home to her in a queer, troublesome way. Suddenly, she didn't know why, she wanted to look at the Grown Ups, to see exactly

what they were like. The rest of the party followed her in a common impulse. Joyce's attitude caused them to tiptoe across the room and peer covertly from behind the long curtains. Without a word of explanation all were aware of their odd feeling of spying on the enemy—an implacable enemy, yet one who is (how plainly we realize it when we see him off guard in the opposing trench, busy at his poor affairs, cooking or washing his socks) so kin to ourselves. With the apprehensive alertness of those whose lives may depend on their nimble observation, they watched the unconscious group at the tea table.

"Daddy's taking three lumps," said Bunny. She spoke louder than is prudent in an outpost, and was s-s-sh-ed.

"Your mother's got her elbow on the table," Ruth whispered.

"Daddy's smacking his lips and chomping," insisted Bunny.

"That's worse than talking with your mouth full."

"How queer they look when they laugh."

"Your mother lifts her head like a hen swallowing."

"Yours has her legs crossed."

"It's a form of nervousness."

"They do all the things they tell us not to," said Joyce.

"Look, he's reaching right across the table for another cake."

Martin watched his parents and their friends. What was there in the familiar scene that became strangely perplexing? He could not have put it into words, but there was something in those voices and faces that made him feel frightened, a little lonely. Was that really Mother, by the silver urn with the blue flame flattened under it? He could tell by her expression that she was talking about things that belong to that Other World, the thrillingly exciting world of Parents, whose secrets are so cunningly guarded. That world changes the subject, alters the very tone of its voice, when you approach. He had a wish to run out on the veranda, to reassure himself by the touch of her soft cool arm in the muslin dress. He wanted to touch the teapot, to see if it was hot. If it was, he would know that all this was real. They had gone so far away.—Or were they also only playing a game?

"They look as though they were hiding something," he said.

"They're having fun," Phyllis said. "They always do; grown ups have a wonderful time."

"Come on,"—Martin remembered that he was the host—"the ice cream will get cold." This was what Daddy always said.

Bunny felt a renewed pride as she climbed into her place at the end of the table. Martin looked solemnly handsome in his Eton collar across the shining spread of candlelight and cloth and pink peppermints. The tinted glass panes above the sideboard were cheerful squares of colour against the wet grey afternoon. She wriggled a little, to reestablish herself on the slippery chair.

"Our family is getting very grown up," she said happily. "We're not going to have a nursery any more. It's going to be the guest room."

"I don't think I want to be grown up," said Alec suddenly. "It's silly. I don't believe they have a good time at all."

This was a disconcerting opinion. Alec, as an older cousin, held a position of some prestige. A faint dismay was apparent in the gazes that crossed rapidly in the sparkling waxlight.

"I think we ought to make up our minds about it," Martin said gravely. "Pretty soon, the way things are going, we *will* be, then it'll be too late."

"Silly, what can you do?" said Phyllis. "Of course we've got to grow up, everyone does, unless they die." Her tone was clear and positive,

but also there was a just discernible accent of inquiry. She had not yet quite lost her childhood birthright of wonder, of belief that almost anything is possible.

"We'd have to Take Steps," cried Alec, unconsciously quoting the enemy. "We could just decide among ourselves that we simply wouldn't, and if we all lived together we could go on just like we are."

"It would be like a game," said Martin, glowing.

"With toys?" ejaculated Bunny, entranced.

Ben was firmly opposed. "I won't do it. I want to have long trousers and grow a moustache."

Martin's face was serious with the vision of huge alternatives.

"That's it," he said. "We've got to know before we can decide. It's terribly important. If they *don't* have a good time, we'd better——"

"We could *ask* them if they're happy," exclaimed Ruth, thrilled by the thought of running out on the veranda to propose this stunning question.

"They wouldn't tell you," said Alec. "They're too polite."

Phyllis was trying to remember instructive examples of adult infelicity. "They don't tell the truth," she agreed. "Mother once said that if

Daddy went on like that she'd go mad, and I waited and waited, and he did and she didn't."

"You mustn't believe what they say," Martin continued. "They never tell the truth if they think children are around. They don't *want* us to know what it's like."

"Perhaps they're ashamed of being grown up," Ben suggested.

"We must find out," Martin said, suddenly feeling in his mind the expanding brightness of an idea. "It'll be a new game. We'll all be spies in the enemy's country, we'll watch them and see exactly how they behave, and bring in a report."

"Get hold of their secret codes, and find where their forces are hidden," cried Ben, who liked the military flavour of this thought.

"I think it's a silly game," said Phyllis. "You can't really find out anything; and if you did, you'd be punished. Spies always get caught."

"Penalty of death!" shouted the boys, elated.

"It's harder than being a real spy," said Martin. "You can't wear the enemy's uniform and talk their language. But I'm going to do it, anyhow."

"Me too!" Joyce exclaimed from the other end of the table, where she and Bunny had followed the conversation with half-frightened excitement.

"I want to be a spy!" added Bunny.

"Mustn't have too many spies," said Alec. "The enemy would suspect something was up. Send one first, he'll see what he can find and report to us."

It was not clear to Bunny exactly who the enemy were or how the spying was to be carried out; but if Martin was to do it, it would be well done, she was certain. Spying, that suggested secrecy, and secrecy——

"Martin has a little roll-top desk with a key!" she shouted. "Daddy gave it to him for his birthday."

"Oh, I forgot," said Phyllis. She ran out into the living room, and returned with a large parcel. "Many happy returns," she said, laying it in front of Martin. If you listen intently, behind the innocent little phrase you can overhear, like a whispering chorus, the voices of innumerable parents: "And don't forget, when you give it to him, to say *Many happy returns*."

The others also hurried to get the packages that had been left in the vestibule. There was a great rattling of paper and untying of string; an embarrassed reiteration of thank-yous by Martin. He felt it awkward to say the same thing again for each gift.

Hearing the movement in the dining room, the grown ups had now come in.

"Such a pretty sight."

"I love children's parties, their faces are always a picture."

"Martin, did you say thankyou to Alec for that lovely croquet set?"

"This is what *I* gave him," said Ben, pushing forward the parcheesi board.

"The girls are so dainty, like little flowers."

"Who is the little dark one, over by the window?"

"That's Joyce.—Why, Joyce dear, what are you crying about?"

The strong maternal voice rang through the room with a terrible publicity of compassion. The children stared. Bunny ran and threw her arms round her friend, who had hidden her face in the curtain. Bunny thought she knew what was wrong. Joyce had forgotten to bring a present, and was ashamed because all the others had done so. The miserable little figure tried to efface itself in the curtain; even the tiny pearl buttons at the back of her pink frock had come undone. Things that are close to us, how loyal they are, how they follow the moods of their owners.

"There, there, honey, what's the trouble? After such a lovely party?" This was authoritative pity, threateningly musical.

Bunny pressed her warm lips against a wet petal of nostril.

"Martin doesn't mind," she whispered. "He *hates* presents."

Joyce could feel powerful fingers buttoning the cool gap between her shoulders. When that was done she would be turned round and asked what was the matter.

"Perhaps she has a pain," boomed a masculine vibration. "These parties always upset them. Worst thing for children."

Joyce could smell a whiff of cigar and see large feet in white canvas shoes approaching. Best to face it now before worse happens. She turned desperately, hampered by Bunny's embrace, almost throttling her in an excess of affection. Breaking away she ran across the room, where Martin and the boys were averting their eyes from the humiliation of the would-be spy. She thrust into his hand a tiny package, damp now.

"It was so small," she said.

A moment of appalling silence hung over the trembling pair. Martin could feel it coming, the words "What do you say, Martin?" seemed forming and rolling up over his head like opal banks of summer storm. Yet he could not have said a

word. He seized her hand and shook it, with a grotesque bob of his head.

"Such a little gentleman, how *do* you train them? I can't do anything with Ben, he's so rough."

Joyce was blotted out by a merciful hooded raincoat. As she struggled through its dark rubber-smelling folds she could hear voices coming down from above.

"Alec, say good-bye to your little cousins—no, we must say your *big* cousins, mustn't we?"

"Thank Mrs. Richmond for such a nice party."

"Thank you, Mrs. Richmond, for such a nice party."

"Martin, you haven't opened Joyce's present."

"I don't want to open it," murmured Martin sullenly. Then he knew he had said the wrong thing.

"Don't want to open it? Why of course you want to open it. We don't measure presents by their size, do we, Joyce?"

Joyce, almost escaped, was drawn again into the arena.

"Come, Alec, we'll see what Joyce has given Martin and then you must go."

"I can't untie it, the string's wet," muttered Martin.

The watching circle drew closer.

"Wet? Nonsense. Here, give it to me."

Unfolding of sodden paper. A mouse of soft grey plush, with little glassy eyes and a long silky tail. And two wheels under his stomach, a key to wind him by.

"Why, it's the mouse we saw in the window at the cigar store. Joyce was crazy about it."

"You see, Martin, she's given you a mouse because she wanted it so much for herself."

"It isn't very much, my dear, but there's so little to choose from, here in the country."

"It's like the mice we had on the nursery wall-paper," said Bunny, praising valiantly.

"Wind it up and see it run."

There are some situations that, once entered, must be carried through to the end. Martin wound. He could tell by the feel of the key that something was wrong.

"I'll play with it later," he said.

"Don't be so stubborn, Martin. We're all waiting to see it."

Joyce's gaze was riveted on the mouse. She remembered the ominous click in its vitals, when she had been giving it an ecstatic trial. But perhaps Martin, with the magic boys have in these matters, could make it go again, as it went—so

thrillingly, in mouselike darts and curves—on the cigar-store floor.

Martin put it down, giving it a deft push. It ran a few inches and stopped.

"It runs fine," he said hastily. "But it won't go here on the rug."

"Let's see it," said Ben, whose mechanical sense was not satisfied by so brief an exhibition.

"It's mine," snapped Martin fiercely, and put it in his pocket.

"We really must go," said someone.

"Would you each like a piece of Martin's cake to take home?"

"Oh, no, thank you, I think they've had plenty."

"Did you make a wish?"

"No, we forgot," said Martin.

"Oh, what a pity. When you blow out the candles on a birthday cake you should always make a wish."

"Will it come true?"

"If it's a nice wish."

"Light them again and do it now," said one of the parents. The drill must be finished.

"Yes, do, before the children go."

"Will it work if you light them again?" asked Martin doubtfully.

"Every bit as well."

The ten candles were reassembled on the remaining sector of cake, and Martin, feeling very self-conscious, stood by while they were relit. His guests were pushed forward.

"All ready? Blow!"

There was a loud puffing. Bunny's blast, a little too late, blew a fragrant waver of smoke into his face.

"Did you wish?"

"Yes," said Martin, "I——"

"You mustn't tell it! If you tell, it won't come true."

But he hadn't wished, yet. He wanted to wait a moment, to get it just right. As the children turned away, trooping toward the door, Martin made one hasty movement that no one saw. With a quick slice of the sharp cake-knife he cut off the tail of the plush mouse. Now it would always serve to remind him of the tailless mice in the room that was no longer a nursery. Then, with the snuff of smoking candles still in his nose, he wished.

## II

**D**EAR MISS CLYDE," wrote Mrs. Granville, "it will be so nice to meet you again after all these years. You can imagine my surprise when I found that the house Mr. Granville has taken for the summer is the old Richmond place, which I remember so well from long ago. Twenty-one years, isn't it? It hasn't changed a bit, but everything seems so much smaller, even the ocean somehow. The house has been shut up a long time, since the summer the Richmonds went away. We want you to join our Family Picnic, which is always an amusing affair. Mr. Granville admires your work so much, I did not realize until recently that you must be the same person I knew as a child. There are other artists here too, the Island has become quite a summer camp for painters, the woods are full of them, painting away merrily. I am sorry this is so late, but just send us a wire saying you can come. . . ."

She paused to reread the letter, and changed "so nice," in the first line, to "nice." She changed

"twenty-one" to "nearly twenty." She crossed out "painting away merrily." How do I know whether they're merry? she asked herself. Then she noticed that the word "summer" was used three times. She changed one of them to "year." No, that made three "years." Put "for the vacation" instead of "for the summer." Now the letter must be copied again.

Why on earth George wanted her to invite the Clyde creature when things were complicated enough already . . . she had never cared much for her even as a child . . . to have outsiders here for the Picnic when they had only just got the old house in running order, and Lizzie was overworked in the kitchen, and expenses terrific anyhow . . . George thought Miss Clyde might be the right person to do the pictures for the booklet he was writing for the railroad company. Always thinking of his business first and her convenience afterward. Business was something to be attended to in offices, not to be mixed up with your home life. Never try to make social friends of your business acquaintances, how many times had she told George that?

Damn the Picnic, damn the Picnic, damn the Picnic!

Of course she had only brought down one sheet

of paper; now she must go up again for more. The dining table was the single place in the house she could write a letter. If she halted in the bedroom, in a moment Nounou was at the door with endless this that and the other about the children. If she sat down on the porch, Lizzie could see her from the pantry window and would come at once with stentorian palaver. Why couldn't a cook do what she was told, not argue about it? In the little sitting room George had spread out his business papers; anyhow, she couldn't bear him near her when she wanted to write. And in the garden it was too hot. A bumblebee was bumping and grumbling against the pane. If you took a cloth and held him, to put him outdoors, his deep warm hum would rise to a piercing scream of anger. She felt like that. If any one touched her . . .

The bee was fussing up and down the window, the one with red and blue and orange panes. She remembered that window from childhood visits to the Richmonds. When you looked through the orange glass, the purest sky turned a leaden green, dull with menace; the clear northern sunlight became a poisoned tropic glare. And the blue panes made everything a crazy cold moonscape, with strange grapejuice colours underneath the

leaves. It reminded her of George's favourite remark, in moments of stress, that women's conduct is entirely physiological. Ponderous pedantry! Vulgar too. Physiology, a hateful word. Suddenly she felt an immense pity for all women . . . even Miss Clyde. She went up to the bedroom to get another sheet of paper.

George had actually moved the bureau at last, so that the light fell justly on the mirror. Yes, the pale green dress was pretty. Like lettuce and mayonnaise, George had said, admiring the frail yellow collar. It brought out the clear blue of the eyes, like sluiced pebbles. She was almost amazed (looking closely) to see how clear they were, after so many angers, so much—physiology. One can be candid in solitude. Thirty-four. What was that story she had read, which said that a woman is at her most irresistible at thirty-five? Mother had sent it to her, in a magazine, and had written in the margin *True of my Phyllis*. She laughed. What a merciless comedy life is. Ten years before, Mother would have marked in the same way any story that said *twenty-five*. Was there no such thing as truth? Blessed Mother, who knew that woman must be flattered. A pity that story hadn't been in a book instead of a magazine. Books carry more authority. . . .

But books, pooh! Who had ever written a book that told the innermost truth? Thank God, in her secret heroic self she was aware of joy and disgust, but she kept them private. Truth is about other people, not about me. A woman doesn't bear and rear three children . . . bring them into the world, a comelier phrase . . . and cohabit with a queer fish like George without knowing what life amounts to. And how enviable she was: young, pretty, slender, with three such adorable kiddies.

"I don't care, there won't be any one at the Picnic prettier. I was made to be happy and I'm going to be."

She hummed a little tune. "Jesus lover of my soul, let me to thy bosom fly." George was vulgar, but he was amusing. When the beetle buzzed down inside her blouse at the beach supper, tickling and crawling so far that she had to go into the bushes to take him out, George said "That must have been the bosom-fly you're always singing about." Sometimes it seemed as though the world was made for the vulgar people, there are always so many ridiculous embarrassments lying in wait for the sensitive. When the wind blew, her skirts always went higher than any one else's. She would wear the new pink camisole at the

Picnic, that fitted very snugly . . . still, a thing like that bosom-fly would hardly happen twice. George always wanted to take jam and sardines on a picnic; sticky stuff that attracts the bees and ants. Fortunately we're all wearing knickers nowadays. . . . Poor old blundering, affectionate, and maddening George. Still it was something to have married a man with brains. There were so many, so much more attractive, she could have had, as Mother (dear loyal Mother) often reminded her. It's a good thing people don't know what mothers and married daughters talk about. That is the rock that life is founded upon: an alliance against the rest of the world. Away off in the future, when her own daughters were married, she would have *them* to confide in. You must have *someone* to whom you can say what you think. But which of the three? You can't confide in more than one. Three little girls, three darling little girls, like dolls. Thank goodness there wasn't a boy to grow up like George: obstinate, greedy, always wanting to do the wrong thing . . . it was enough to break any woman's spirit, trying to teach a man to do things the way nice people do them. If George wanted to lead an unconventional life, he ought to have been an artist, not gone in for

business. . . . And such a crazy kind of business, Publicity, now working for one company, now for another, here there and everywhere, neither flesh nor fowl nor good red income. A man ought to have a settled job, with an office in some fixed place, so you always know where he is. A country club is a good thing for a husband, too, where he can meet the right sort of men (how handsome they are in those baggy breeches and golf stockings), lawyers and a banker or two, influential men with nice manners. You can always 'phone to the clubhouse and leave word; or drive up in the coupé (it ought to be a coupé) and bring him home to dinner. She could hear voices, voices of young pretty wives (not too young, not quite as pretty): "Who is that in the green dress, with the three little girls all dressed alike, aren't they *cunning!*—Oh, that's Mrs. Granville, Mrs. George Granville, her husband's in the advertising business, he adores her."

Where was the box of notepaper? The children must have been at it, the top had been jammed on carelessly, split at one corner. Of all annoying things, the worst is to have people pawing in your bureau; there isn't any key, of course. How can a woman be happy if she can't even have any privacy in her own bureau drawer? If George ever

wants anything he always comes rummaging here first of all. The other day it was the little prayer-book.—Why, George, what do you want with a prayerbook? I thought you were an atheist.—So I am, but I want to strengthen my disbelief. I was beginning to weaken.—What a way to talk. George *is* an atheist, but he believes in religion for other people: because it makes them more unselfish, I dare say. Yet, in a queer way, George has a pious streak. Perhaps he's really more religious than I am.—The only thing I have against God is that He's a man . . . not a man, but . . . well, Masculine. How can He understand about the special troubles of women? That must be the advantage of being a Catholic, you pray to the Virgin. She can understand. But can She? After all, a Virgin . . . I *mustn't* let my mind run on like this, it's revolting the things you find yourself thinking.

From the bay window at the head of the stairs, over the garden and the sweep of grassy hill, she could see the water. Along the curve of shore, a thin crisp of foam edging the tawny sand. If she didn't get off that letter to Miss Clyde it would be too late for her to come to the Picnic. The Brooks were coming this afternoon. It was Nounou's evening off, too. What perfect weather.

This lovely world, this lovely world. Oh, well, if George wanted the Picnic now, she might as well go through with it.

As she went down, George was in the hall, lighting his pipe. He looked very tall and ruddy and cheerful: almost handsome in his blue linen shirt and flannel trousers. An eddy of smoke rose about his head. She halted on the stairs.

"George! Don't puff so much smoke. I want to see the top of your head . . . I do believe it's getting thin."

"How pretty you look," he said. "I like the green shift."

He enjoyed calling things by wrong names, and the word *shift* always amused him. He found words entertaining, a habit that often annoyed her. But this time she did not stop to correct him.

"You ought to wear a rubber cap when you go bathing. The salt water gets your hair all sticky, and then the comb tears it out. I don't mind your being an atheist, but I'd hate you to be bald."

He blew a spout of tobacco smoke up at her. It was extraordinarily fragrant. Oh, well, she thought, he's not a bad old thing. He's endurable.

"George." She intended to say, "I love you." But of their own accord the words changed themselves before they escaped into voice.

"George, do you love me?"

He made his usual unsatisfactory reply. "Well, what do you think?" Of course the proper answer is, "I *adore* you." She knew, by now, that he never would make it; probably because he was aware she craved it.

"I'm writing Miss Clyde to come to the Picnic."

He looked a little awkward.

"Needn't do that, I wrote to her yesterday. I said you were busy and wanted me to ask her."

"Well, of all things——"

She curbed herself savagely. She *wouldn't* lose her temper. Damn, damn, damn . . . his damned impudence.

"When is she coming?"

"I don't know yet. To-morrow morning, I dare say."

"Well, then, we'll have the Picnic to-morrow, get it over with."

He began to say something, put out his hand, but she brushed fiercely past him and ran into the dining room. She tore her letter into shreds, together with the clean sheet she had brought down. The room was full of a warm irritating buzz.

"George!" she cried angrily, with undeniable command. "Come here and put out this damned bee!"

### III

THE kitchen was hot, flies were zigzagging just under the ceiling, swerving silly triangles of ecstasy in the rising savour of roast and sizzling gravy.

"Lizzie, you *must* keep the screen door latched. There was a big bee in the dining room. That's how they get in.—Where are the children?"

"It's that man, he always leaves it open."

"The ice man? Well, speak to him about it."

"No, ma'am, the one in the garden. The one Nounou took 'em down to the beach to get away from. She didn't think he was quite right."

What on earth was Lizzie talking about?

"A man in the garden? What's he doing here?"

"I gave him a piece of cake. He saw it in the pantry window and asked for some. Then he was in again for a glass of water."

Another problem. Life is just one perplexity after another. But there must be some explanation.

"He asked for a piece of cake? Who is he, the gardener?"

Lizzie was flushed with heat and impatience. Her voice rose shrilly.

"He didn't exactly ask for it, but he was lookin' in the window at it and he says, 'They always give me a piece of cake when I want it.' No, he ain't the gardener. I don't know who he is. I thought maybe a friend of yours, one o' the artists. He was playin' with the kids."

She stepped outside, resolutely attempting not to think. Automatically she adjusted the lid of the garbage can. But the mind insists on thinking. Was it better for the can to stand there in the sun, or to go in the cellar entry where it would be cooler? Sunlight is a purifier: the heat would tend to dry the moist refuse . . . but the sun attracts flies too. She stooped to lift the can, then paused, abandoned the problem, left it where it was. Just like George to have rented an old-fashioned barracks like this, not even gas for cooking. No wonder the place had stood empty for years and years. The idea of cooking with coal in July. If the oil range didn't come soon Lizzie would quit, she could see it in her face. The ice box was too small. If they took enough ice to last through the day, there was no room for the ginger-ale bottles. She had known it would be like this.

The garden seemed to sway and tremble in brilliant light. A warm sweetness of flowers floated lightly, the air was not really hot after all. Why did Nounou let the children leave their croquet mallets lying all anyhow about the lawn? Remind George that Nounou's wages will be due on the twenty-third. If you don't remind George of those things he complains about being taken by surprise. Beyond the hedge of rose bushes, a blue glimpse of water. It *was* a heavenly place. There must be some consolation in a garden like this. If one could breathe it in deeply and not think, not think, just slack off the everlasting tension for a few moments. Of course it's quite useless, but I'm going to pray. God, please help me not to think. . . . In France, Catholics say *vous* to God, and Protestants say *tu*. That's rather curious. . . . There, I'm thinking again. No wonder the artists come here in summer, the Island is so lovely. Loafers, that's what they are, idling about enjoying themselves making pictures while other people plan the details of meals and housekeeping . . . and Picnics. She could imagine Miss Clyde sitting in the garden sketching, relishing it all, romping with the children, while *she* was doing the marketing. Are there enough blankets for the guest-room bed?

And with only one bathroom . . . Miss Clyde is probably the kind of person who takes a terrible long time over her bath.

The strip of beach gravel that led toward the rose-trellis was warm and crackly underfoot. Among the grey pebbles were small bleached shells. Once upon a time, she had told the children, those shells belonged to snails who lived in the sea. When the tide went out, their little rocky pool got warm and torpid in the glare. Then the sea came back again, crumbling over the ledges with a fresh hoarse noise: great gushes of cold salty water pouring in, waving the seaweeds, waking up the crabs. She could imagine the reviving snails wriggling happily in their spiral cottages, feeling that coolness prickle along their skins. She would like to lie down on the gravel and think about this. Would reality, joy, truth, ever come pouring in on her like that? There was a bench in the rose-garden, if she could get so far. When things are a bit too much for one (fine true old phrase: they *are* just a little too much for us, adorable torturing *things*) it's so strangely comforting to lie flat on sun-warmed earth . . . the legend of Antæus . . . but not here, Lizzie could see her from that synoptic pantry window. How large a proportion of life consists in heroically

denying the impulse? But just round this corner, behind the shrubbery——

Someone was doing it already. Oh, this must be the man Lizzie spoke of. How very odd: sprawled on the gravel, playing with pebbles. Lizzie must have been right, one of the artists. Unconventional, to come into a private garden like that . . . asking for a piece of cake. Never be surprised, though, at artists. Perhaps he's doing a still-life painting: something very modern, a slice of cocoanut cake on a lettuce leaf. Artists (she had a vague idea) enjoyed making pictures of food. But he'd been playing with the children, Lizzie said. What sort of person would play with children before being introduced to their parents? Perhaps he wanted to do a portrait of them. Portraits of children were better done with the mother, who could keep them quiet . . . I always think there's no influence like a mother's, don't you? . . . On the bench in the rose-garden, that would be the place. She could see the picture, reproduced in *Vanity Fair* . . . Green Muslin: Study of Mrs. George Granville and Her Daughters. But even if it were painted at once it couldn't possibly be printed in a magazine before next—when? January? George would know about that. But strange the man didn't

get up, he must hear her coming. He looked like a gentleman.

"How do you do?" she said, a little coldly.

He was studying the pebbles; at the sound of her voice he twisted and looked up over his shoulder. He seemed faintly shy, yet also entirely composed.

"Hullo!" he said. "I mean, how do you do." His voice was very gentle. (How different from George.) Something extraordinary about his way of looking at her; what clear hazel eyes. Instead of offering any explanation he seemed waiting for her to say something. She had confidently expected a quick scramble to his feet, a courteous apology for intruding. She felt a little angry at herself for not being able to speak as reprovably as he deserved. But there was a crumb on his chin, somehow this weakened her. A man who would come into people's gardens and ask for cake and not even wipe the crumbs off his chin. He must be someone rather special.

"You're doing just what I wanted to," she said.

He looked at her, still with that placid inquiry.

"I mean lying on the ground, in the sun."

"It's nice," he said.

Really, of all embarrassing situations. If he didn't get up, she felt that in another minute she *would* be sprawling there herself. A very un-

graceful pose for the portrait: Mrs. George Granville and Her Daughters, prone on the gravel. Women ought not to lie like that anyway, it humps up the sitting-part so obviously. Yet they always do in bathing suits, most candid of all costumes. . . . Perhaps for that very reason. What queer contradictions there are in good manners. This was too absurd. Thank goodness, he was getting to his feet. The crumb shone in the sunlight, it adhered to his chin with some of Lizzie's sticky white icing.

"Was the cake good?" She meant this to be rather cutting, and was pleased to see him look a little frightened.

"Awfully good." Now he looked hopeful, rather like a dog. She could not altogether understand the queer way he had of studying her: steadily, yet without any of the annoying or alarming intimations that long gazes usually suggest. But he made no movement to leave.

"I suppose you're waiting for another piece."

"Yes," he said, smiling.

Now, she felt, she had him trapped. This would destroy him.

"You haven't finished the first."

He understood at once, and ran his tongue toward his chin until it found the crumb. She

watched it disappear with the feeling of having lost an ally. She had counted on that crumb to humiliate him with.

"All gone," he announced gaily. What could one do with a man like that?

"I suppose you're an artist." Not knowing what else to do she had turned toward the house, and he was walking with her. He was tall and pleasantly dressed and had rather a nice way of walking: politely tentative, yet with plenty of assurance.

"I'm Martin."

Her mind made little rushes one way and another, trying to think if she had heard of him. He must be very famous, to give his name with such easy simplicity. Why do I know so little about art? she asked herself. Well, how can I keep up with things, there's always so much to do. It's George's fault, expecting me to run a big house. If we'd gone to the Inn . . . what are the names of the famous painters? Sargent was the only one she could think of. She could see George at the pantry window. In a moment she would have to introduce them, what should she say? What was George doing in the pantry?

"George, let that cake alone!" she called. It sounded a pleasant humorous cry, but George's well-tuned ear caught the undertone of fury. That

was just like George. Whenever he was angry or upset he went to the pantry and got himself something to eat.

"I was saving the cake for the Picnic," she explained.

"A Picnic!" said the stranger. His brown face was bright with interest. "When?"

If George could invite people to the Picnic, why shouldn't she? By the way, I mustn't forget to order some sardines.

"Where are you staying?" she asked.

Apparently he didn't understand this, for he replied, "I don't mind." He was looking at the pantry window, where George's guilty face peered out from behind the wire screen.

"How funny he looks, like a guinea-pig in a cage," he said.

That was exactly what George did look like, squinting out into the sunshine. The end of his nose, pressed against the mesh, was white and red, like a half-ripe strawberry.

"George, this is Mr. Martin, the famous artist He's coming to our Picnic."

#### IV

**G**EORGE was in a fidget, in the little sitting room that opened off the hall. It was just under the stairs and when any one went up or down he could hear the feet and couldn't help pausing to identify them by the sound. It was astonishing how many footsteps passed along those stairs: and if they ceased for a while it was no better, for he found himself subconsciously waiting for the next and wondering whose they would be. He had laid out his maps and papers and the portable typewriter, all ready to begin work: the draft of his booklet on Summer Tranquillity (for the Eastern Railroad) would soon be due.

His mind was too agitated to compose, but he began clattering a little on the machine, at random, just to give the impression that he was working. Why should any one invent a 'noiseless' typewriter, he wondered? The charm of a typewriter was that it *did* make a noise, a noise that shut out the racket other people were making. What a senseless idea, to imagine that he could

really get some work done here, buried in the country. He could not concentrate because there was nothing to concentrate *from*. There was only the huge vacancy of golden summer, droning pine trees, yawning beaches, the barren pagan earth under a crypt of air. The world shimmered like a pale jewel with a flame of uneasiness at its core. The place to write about Summer Tranquillity would have been that hot secret little office of his in town, where the one window opened like a furnace door into a white blaze of sunshine, where perspiration dripped from his nose on the typewriter keys, but where he had the supreme sensation of intangible solitude.

What on earth were they walking about for, upstairs? Was she showing the man the whole house? He looked distractedly across the garden. The listless beaming of the summer noon lay drowsy upon the lawn, filling him with an appalling sense of his absurd futility. As Phyllis had so often said, he was neither business man nor artist. What the devil was he working for, what goal was there, what fine flamboyant achievement was possible? He had a feeling of being alone against the world, a poor human clown wrestling with grotesque obsessions; and no longer really young

He leaned toward the glass-paned bookcase, tilting his head anxiously to see the reflection of the top . . . certainly it was receding in a V above each temple—but that made the forehead seem higher. He had always believed that, among advertising men, he looked rather more intellectual . . . he turned again to the window, a little ashamed of his agitations. Beyond the glass veranda he caught the stolid gaze of the cook at the pantry window. He averted his head quickly: ridiculous that you can't do anything without catching someone's eye. All this was just insanity. He took up the page he was working on and rolled it into the typewriter. Page 38 . . . like himself, thirty-eight, and forty only two pages away. I suppose that at forty a man feels just as young as ever, but . . . it's absurd to feel as young as I do, at thirty-eight. . . . Well, I must keep my mind clear (he thought, rather pathetically)—it's the only capital we have.

Phyllis's footsteps were coming downstairs. He was always worried when he heard them like that: slow and light, pausing every few treads. That meant she was thinking about something, and in a minute there would be a new problem

for him to consider. When he heard them like that he usually rushed into the hall, demanding hotly, "Well, what is it *now*?"

"What is what?"

"You know I can't work when you come downstairs like that."

"Like *what*?"

"As enough you were worrying."

"Well, why didn't you take a house where I could slide down the banisters?"

This time the feet came down so slowly he felt sure she *wanted* him to rush out. The rushing out always put him in the wrong. Well, he just wouldn't. He would stay where he was, that would show her he was indignant. He took out page 38, put in a blank sheet and rattled the keys vigorously. But he felt cheated of a sensation. He always enjoyed bursting out, through the door at the foot of the stairs, and catching her transfixed on the landing, with the big windows behind her—half frightened, half angry. He would not have told her so, but it was partly because she was so pretty there: the outline of her comely defiant head against the light, her smooth arm emerging from the dainty sleeve that caught and held a pearly brightness. How lovely she is, he thought; it's gruesome for her to be so pretty

and talk such nonsense . . . she needs someone to pump her full of indigestible compliments that would silence her——

She was at the telephone. He could hear her talking to the grocer. "I'm sorry, Mr. Cotswold, is it too late to catch the driver? I've got some unexpected guests . . ."

He hastened into the hall. "Don't forget the sardines," he shouted.

She looked at him calmly with the instrument at her mouth. She seemed surprisingly tranquil.

"Never mind, then, thank you," she said to Mr. Cotswold, in the particularly cordial and gracious voice which (George felt) was meant to emphasize the coolness with which she would now speak to him.

"If you want sardines you'll have to go down and get them yourself. The driver's left."

She went into the sitting room and automatically pulled the blind halfway down. He followed her and raised it to the top of the window again. She sat on the couch, and he was surprised to see a dangerous merriment in her face.

"I suppose you think you can shut yourself in here and just let the house run itself," she said. "Like a sardine."

"I have to do my work, don't I?"

She looked at the sheet in the typewriter, on which was written wildly *Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of this absurd family.* But she did not comment on it, and George felt that this was one of her moments of genius. He wondered, in alarm, what she was going to do with him next. He felt helpless as only a husband can.

"Well, anyhow, they pack sardines in oil, not in vinegar," he said angrily. This sounded so silly it made him angrier still. He closed the door and cried in a fierce undertone, "What's the idea, this man Martin? Who is he? Is he staying for lunch?"

"He's an artist. I thought you liked artists."

"Yes, but we don't have to fill the house with 'em."

"I've put him in the spare room."

"In the spare room! What about Miss Clyde?"

"I haven't the faintest idea. He seemed to expect it, somehow. He's a very irresistible person."

"I guess I can resist him. If we've got to have him in the house we can put him in here, on the couch."

"It's too late. He's in the spare room now, washing his hands.—You needn't have been so rude when I brought him in."

"I didn't like his looks," George mumbled.

This wasn't true. George *had* liked his looks, but he had resented (as must every man burdened with many perplexities) that gay and careless air. He looks as if he didn't have a thing on earth to worry about, George thought. And he comes floating in here, with casual ease, among the thousand interlocking tensions of George's difficulties, to gaze with untroubled eye on his host's restless alertness. Or was this some sort of joke that Phyllis was putting over on him?

"I'm going to put the two older children on the sleeping porch, so Een and Ruth can have their room. Miss Clyde will have to go on this couch."

"How about me?"

"Well, we can sleep together I suppose. It won't kill us, for a few nights."

Not if I know it, George thought. That old walnut bedstead, with the deep valley in the middle, so that we both keep rolling against one another. Unless you clutch the post and lie on a slope all night. Besides, Phyl is so changeable in temperature. When she goes to bed she's chilly and wants to kindle her feet against you. Then by and by she gets warmed up and it's like sleeping with a hot bottle five feet long. On a night in July, too. Whenever I get comfortable, she

wants to turn over on the other side; that brings us face to face. Impossible! How unexpected life is. If any one had told me, twelve years ago, that it would be so irritating to sleep in the same bed with a pretty woman, I wouldn't have believed it. Phyl doesn't like it either, yet she was annoyed by that booklet I wrote for the Edwards Furniture Company on *The Joys of the Separate Bed*. I'll sleep on the window seat in the upstairs hall. No: that won't do, if Miss Clyde is in the den she'll have to be coming upstairs to the bathroom and Phyl won't like me spread out there in public. It's funny: sleeping is the most harmless thing people ever do, why are they so furtive about it?

But George rather liked the idea of Miss Clyde on his couch. It seemed, somehow, to add piquancy to a dull situation. To conceal this private notion, he argued against it.

"Miss Clyde will be a long way from the bathroom," he said.

"There's no other place to put her. You're always talking about artists, their fine easy ways, I guess she won't mind if someone sees her in a wrapper."

She'd look charming in a wrapper, George

thought. The queer little boyish thing! I can just imagine her. It would be blue, a kind of filmy blue crêpe. Coming up the stairs the morning sunlight would catch her, through those big windows: her small curves delicately outlined in a haze of soft colour, her hair tousled, a flash of white ankle as she reached the top step. He would sit up on the window seat, as though just drowsily awakened. Oh . . . good-morning! Good-morning. What a picture you would make. Silhouette Before Breakfast. Life is full of so many heavenly pictures. . . . The bay window above the garden would be calm and airy in the before-breakfast freshness of July; the house just beginning that dreamy stir that precedes the affairs of day. She would come across to him . . . he had hardly dared admit, even to himself, how far they had gone in imagination. . . .

"I'm damned if I want strange women careering all over the house in their wrappers," he said with well-simulated peevishness.

"Bosh!" exclaimed Phyllis. "There's nothing you'd like better. Unless without their wrappers."

"What's the use of being vulgar?" he said. He thought: How gorgeous Phyllis is. You can't fool her.

Poor old George, thought Phyllis. I believe he imagines that he's attractive to women. But I won't say that to him, he's in such a stew already.

"Miss Clyde is one of the most truly refined people I ever met."

This didn't quite succeed. Phyllis was always annoyed when George attempted to bunco her. He was so transparent.

"I believe you imagine you're attractive to women," she said.

"Hell," he said, "I don't even take time to think about it."

"If that were true, you'd be much more so."

If I'd finished this cursed booklet, he thought, I'd take a little time off and *be* attractive to women, just to surprise her. Why, damnation, I could even make Phyl fall in love with me if it was worth taking the trouble. The way to please women is to show them that you know they're not happy. And that their special kind of unhappiness is a particularly subtle and lonely one, but curable by sympathy. But it's better not to think about these things at all. It's queer to think of all the people in the world, and how troubled they are when they look each other straight in the eyes. If I knew why that is, I'd know everything. The devil of it is, women have begun to think. That's

why everything is so uneasy. Why even Phyllis has begun to think. I mustn't let her, because she's too fond of being comfortable. It'll only upset her. She *must* be kept amused. That's the beauty of money, it's a substitute for thinking. It can surround you with delightful distractions. It's like women, too: it comes to the fellows who know how to entertain it. I must learn how to be attractive to money.

"Certainly, Phyl, no one can say that *you're* attractive to women. You're too pretty." He leaned over and kissed the end of her nose. There, perhaps that would calm her, he might still be able to do half an hour's writing before the children came back from the beach. That was the only solution. Simplify, simplify life by burying yourself in some work of imagination—such as the Eastern Railway booklet. He smiled bitterly. Those were the only happy people, the artists—immersed in dreams like frogs in a pond, only their eyes bulging just above the surface. But how are you going to attain that blissful absorption? Dominate the ragings of biology by writing railroad folders? The whole universe turns contrary, he thought, to the one who wants to create. Time is against him, carnal distraction, the natural indolence of man. Yes, even God is against him:

God, Who invented everything and is jealous of other creators. If Phyllis hadn't been there, he would have fallen on his knees by the couch and told God what he thought of Him.

They heard someone coming downstairs. Phyllis rose.

"Come in, Mr. Martin! See the nice little den where George does his work."

**G**EORGE is carving the meat. He always feels better at meal times. The trouble with me, he thinks, is that I take things too seriously. I dare say I haven't any sense of humour. Let's see if we can't make a sort of fresh start from this moment.

The three little girls are brown and gay. Phyllis looks tired, but busily exhibits that staccato sprightliness that comes over her when there are guests. This Mr. Martin seems a silent fellow. The children stare at him, and seem to have some joke among themselves; Sylvia and Rose nudge each other and giggle. I always think it's a mistake to let the two younger ones sit side by side. But Mr. Martin seems unaware of them: his eyes are fixed on Phyllis with a cheerful watchfulness. He's a solemn bird, thinks George, but he has the good taste to admire Phyl. I hope he won't overdo it, for her sake. She can't stand much admiring: it goes to her head right away.

"Well," Phyllis says, "this is really delightful. A distinguished guest is just what we needed to

make the Picnic a success. Children, don't kick the legs of the table.—Mr. Granville is so fond of artists, he employs such a lot of them in his business. Of course, I dare say your kind of work is quite different, but there must be a lot of painters who wouldn't know what to do if it weren't for the little advertising jobs that come along. We're so happy to be in the country again. Of course we live very simply, but Mr. Granville can always work so well when he gets away from the office. I feel so sorry for the men who have to be in town all summer."

George feels a violent impulse to contradict her, but masters it. Phyl, he says, ask Lizzie to bring a spoon for the gravy. She always forgets it.—Mr. Martin, I'll tell you the kind of people we are, we never have a carving knife sharp enough to cut with.

"Well, George, it's not our own carving knife. You see, Mr. Martin, we took this house furnished. It's not like having our own things."

Our own isn't any better, George's voice shouts angrily inside his head, but he manages to keep it from coming out.

Are we going to the Haunted House for the Picnic? the children ask.

Not unless you take your elbows off the table,

Phyllis says sharply. Mr. Martin, who looks puzzled, takes his elbows off too.

There's a poor old tumbledown farm, on a sandy cliff, among dark pine trees, Phyllis explains. Someone has told the children that it's haunted. The word means nothing to them, but they can tell—by the way people say it—that it suggests something interesting.

Yes, if it doesn't rain, George says. He is too experienced a parent ever to make positive promises.

This would have been a good day for cold meat and salad, he thinks, sawing away at the joggling-slippery roast. Phyllis sees him thinking it. "I'm sorry to have hot meat on such a warm day, but we'll need it to-morrow for the sandwiches. There's some iced tea coming."

"Hot meat to make your inside hot, iced tea to make it cold," the children exclaim. "Do we have to eat the fat?"

They always ask this question. Then Mr. Martin asks it too, which causes amusement. How delightful Mr. Martin is, Phyllis thinks. He has a sort of eagerness to be happy, to enjoy things, to move blithely from one minute to the next. Even George feels it, he looks less cross. But George, as he takes down a tall glass of iced

tea in one draught, is making calmly desperate resolves. I haven't the faintest idea what anything means, he is telling himself, but I'm just going to go on placidly. I'll go cracked if I keep on worrying. Maybe after lunch I can take a snooze in the garden. One of the little girls wriggles happily on her chair, her pink frock has slipped sideways on her smooth brown shoulder, showing the frilled strap of her shirt. With a gentle twitch George pulls her dress straight and pats the child's golden nape. She looks at him with innocent affection. That little bare shoulder makes him think of women and their loveliness, and all the torments of unease to which these same poor youngsters must grow up. He concentrates his mind on the blue and white platter, the brown gravy dimpled with clear circles of fat and turning ruddy as the juice of the roast trickles down, the amber tea with slices of lemon. Thank Heaven Time still lies before them all like an ocean. Even he and Phyllis are young, they don't need to do anything definite about life, not yet. Keep your mind on the small beautiful details, the crackling yield of bread-crust under the knife, the wide hills over the sea, sunset on open spaces that evaporates all passion, all discontent. He picks up his napkin from the rug, helps himself to vegetables,

and begins to eat. How delicious life is, even for an abject fool like me, he thinks. I wonder if any one ever feels old?

"The Picnic is our great annual adventure," Phyllis was saying. "I hope you won't think us too silly, but we *do* look forward to it enormously. It's such fun to forget about things once in a while and just have a good time."

"Yes," said George, "we worry about it for weeks beforehand. And we always invite more people than the house can properly hold."

Phyllis flashed a little angry brightness across the table.

"You mustn't think us too informal if things are a bit crowded, that's part of the fun."

"What is informal?" asked Mr. Martin, quite gravely.

George smiled. Why, the man was kidding her.

"Informal's what women always say they're going to be and never are."

"George loves to lay down the law about women, Mr. Martin. As a matter of fact he knows nothing about them. I expect you know more than he does, even if you're a bachelor."

"Is there a lot to know?" said Mr. Martin.

The man's delightful, thought George.

I never felt as queer as this before, thought

Phyllis. I feel as though something astonishing were going to happen. Or worse still, as though nothing would *ever* happen. How many sandwiches will we need? Three children, two of us, Mr. Martin, Ben and Ruth, Miss Clyde—that makes nine. When this gruesome Picnic is over, perhaps I shall have a chance to ease up. I feel as though I should like to fall in love with someone. I wonder if Mr. Martin would do?

"Mr. and Mrs. Brook are coming this evening," she said gaily. "You'll like them, they're charming."

"As a matter of fact," said George (she always knew, when he began with that phrase, that he was going to contradict her), "they're the dullest people on earth; so completely dull that you can't help envying them. They're the perfect mates, too stupid even to disagree with each other. If every other couple in the world went smash, marriage would still be justified by Ben and Ruth."

"How do couples go smash?" asked Janet.

"You finish your beans and don't talk," said Phyllis.

She was pleasantly fluttered by the way Mr. Martin looked at her. His eyes kept returning from his plate: lingering on her face with a gently inquiring studiousness that was not at all offensive.

I believe he really does want to do a portrait of me, she thought. He's fixing the features in his mind. She turned her head toward Sylvia and Rose so that he would see the half-profile with an appealing madonna softness upon it. The coloured glass panes behind her, what a vivid background that would make.—But she felt he was about to ask a question, and allowed her eyes to come round to meet him, to make it easier for him. Obviously he was shy.

“Do I have to finish my beans?” he said.

What a difficult question to answer. There must be some joke that she did not see.

“Beans make bones,” asserted Rose fatuously.

“Why, of course not,” she said hastily. “I was afraid that cocoanut cake would take away your appetite.” No, that was the wrong thing to say: she saw George's face sharpen at the mention of the cake: he was getting ready to blurt out something and she felt sure it would be awkward. With the speed of a hunted animal her mind dodged in search of some remark that would give her time to think.

“I like the English way of serving beans, slicing them lengthwise, you know; it makes them so tender, without any strings.” There; surely that would dispose of the absurd topic. “George,

what are you going to do this afternoon? Go for a swim?"

"But these *are* string beans," said George. "They're supposed to have strings. Perhaps Mr. Martin misses them."

"If he doesn't finish his beans, Virginia can have them," Sylvia suggested. "She eats vegetables sometimes."

Virginia was the cat, just now obviously misnamed. Phyllis knew very well what was coming next, but she could not speak fast enough to avert it.

"Beans will be good for her," said Janet with enthusiasm. "She's going to have a family very soon, she needs nourishing food."

"Mother says she mustn't have a shock, it might be bad for the kittens."

"That'll do, never mind about Virginia."

Lizzie was making grimaces from the kitchen door, holding up a cup custard and contorting a red face of inquiry. Phyllis nodded. But perhaps Lizzie means there aren't enough custards to go round? "Oh, Lizzie, put on the fruit too."

George, with his damnable persistence, had not forgotten.

"How about the cake?" he asked.

"George, you know we've got to save the cake

for the Picnic. I can't ask Lizzie to make another one."

"It's been cut already," he said.

I'm *not* going to be humiliated like this in front of a stranger. George is just doing it because he sees Mr. Martin admires me. Will this meal never end? I'm past battling over trifles. Have the cake if you want it. I don't care. If Lizzie puts it on, all right. Leave it to her. I'm not going to order it on. Cooks always take the man's side anyhow. I'm afraid Mr. Martin will think we're lunatics.

"What do you think of a husband that always knows exactly what's in the pantry?" she asked him.

A moment later she couldn't remember what he had said to this. Perhaps it's because I'm so absorbed in my own thoughts. The only thing I really remember his saying was his comical question whether he need finish his beans. It's odd, how much he conveys without saying anything, just by a look.

Lizzie had put on the cake. Phyllis saw at once that there were only six custards. She could tell, by the way Lizzie planked them down, there were no more in the kitchen. If they all took one there wouldn't be any for Lizzie herself, and that would

mean bad temper. She refused the custard. She wanted a peach, but felt that the effort of peeling it was too much. Soft fuzzy skin and wet fingers. Then George, with that occasional insight that always surprised her, passed her one peeled and sliced.

"Yes," he said, "we ought to have a bathe, unless there's a storm. Relieve the pressure on the bathroom."

"Then we'll all be nice and clean for the Picnic," exclaimed the children.

"Miss Clyde is coming," George continued. "She's an artist too, perhaps Mr. Martin knows her."

"Bring the jug of iced tea in the garden, let's finish it out there," said Phyllis. "It's stifling here.—Children, you go and get your naps."

The little table was under the pine trees, the other side of the croquet oval. The grove smelt warm and slippery. Now there are the long hours of the afternoon to be lived through, somehow. George sprawled himself on the brown needles, the smoke of his pipe drifted past her in a blue whiff. Mr. Martin put a chair for her.

"I love these pine trees," she said. "They're always whispering."

"It isn't polite to whisper."

She smiled at him. He does say the quaintest things.

"Nature never is polite. On an afternoon like this the whole world seems to yawn in your face."

"These trees smell like cough drops." This was George.

An artist's mind is always on the beautiful, Phyllis thought. She pulled her skirt down a little, and tried to decide what was the most beautiful thing visible, so she could call his attention to it. She wished she hadn't said that about yawning, she felt one coming on. The hot lunch had made her frightfully drowsy. Across the bay thunderheads were massing and rolling up, deep golden purple. "I wish I could paint," she said. "See those wonderful——" But she began the sentence too late; the yawn overtook her in the middle of it.

"Wonderful what?" asked George, looking up. She was struggling with the desire to gape; she trembled with the violence of her effort. George stared.

"Are you ill?"

"Wonderful clouds," she finished savagely. George watched her, adding one more tally to his private conviction that women are mostly mad.

"If you poured heavy cream into a glass of grape

juice," he said, "it would look just like that. Coiling round and clotting."

Sickening idea, Phyllis thought.

"I know exactly what's going to happen, just about the time I have to drive over——"

He was going to say it, she felt it coming. He was going to say *depot* instead of *station*. George always said *depot* when they were in the country, and she couldn't bear it. It was coming, it was coming; everything was predestined; all her life she had known this scene was on the way, sitting under the hot croup-kettle smell of the pine trees, blue thunder piling up on the skyline, poor adorable George mumbling away, and Mr. Martin watching them with his air of faint surprise. It was like the beginning of some terrible poem. Everything in life was a symbol of everything else. The slices of lemon lying at the bottom of the iced-tea jug, on a soft cloud of undissolved sugar, even they were a symbol of something. . . .

"George!" she interrupted desperately. "I had the most terrible premonition. I felt that you were going to say *depot*."

"Why, yes, I was going to say, just about the time I'm ready to drive over——"

For his own sake, for her sake, for Mr. Martin's sake, George must be prevented. If he used that

word, she would know that all this was fore-ordained, beyond help and hope. With a quick movement she pushed her glass of tea off the table; it cascaded onto George's ankle. He paused in surprise.

"I'm *so* sorry. How careless of me, your nice white socks, look out, that little piece of ice is going down inside your shoe."

She felt that the guest's eyes were upon her. He must have seen her do it. "Is that why they call it a tumbler?" he said.

"Never mind," said George cheerfully. "It feels fine. I wish it was down my neck."

For a moment transparent Time swung in a warm, dull, uncertain equilibrium. Phyllis could see Lizzie jolt heavily down the kitchen steps and bend over the garbage can. The grinding clang of the lid came like a threatening clap of cymbals. How glorious it would be if she and Lizzie, each with a garbage can and lid, could suddenly break into a ritual dance on the lawn, posturing under the maddening sunlight, clashing away their fury in a supreme dervish protest. How surprised George and Mr. Martin would be. She and Lizzie making frantic and mocking gestures, sweating the comedy out of their veins, breaking through the dull mask of polite behaviour into the great rhythms and

furies of life. No longer to be tired out by little things, but to be exhausted and used by some great ecstasy. She was watching every movement life made, and thinking, as it was finished, There, that's over, it never can happen again. But it all *would* happen again, and how weary she was of keeping to herself her heavy burden of secret desires and pangs. Why couldn't she tell George? But if you tried to tell George things, he went far, far away—because, probably, he too had so much that he yearned to tell. You can't really be intimate with people who know you so well. Yet she had never been so fond of him. Here, in this garden, they seemed for an instant secure from the terror of the world. Behind these walls, these burning roses, disorderly forces could not reach them.

Mr. Martin was a comforting sort of guest, he did not talk but just looked happy and was spooning up the sugar from the bottom of his glass. Drink life to the bottom of the vessel, you always find some sugar there, all the more palatable for the lemony taste.

A clear compulsory ringing trilled keenly across the lawn. They listened, unwilling to move.

Then there was the squeak of the screen being lifted in the pantry window. Lizzie put out her

head and called. Phyllis found it impossible to stir.

"George, you go. Then you can put on some dry socks."

"Nonsense," he said, getting up. "I'll be lots wetter than that if the storm breaks while I'm driving to the depot."

## VI

PHYLLIS could feel the whole flat of visible world gently tilting. Equilibrium, if there had been any, was gone: they had begun to slide. George, receding across the level grass, seemed to descend a downward slope. Martin was lying at ease on the ground beside her, with one knee bent and the other leg cocked across it. Perhaps that's why he's so fond of lying on the ground. It's easier to keep from sliding. He seemed to have forgotten she was there and was humming to himself. She felt he had the advantage that silent people always have over the talkative. But if she could get him into conversation, she could make him realize that she was more thoughtful than she seemed.

"I'm glad you didn't finish your beans," she began.

He did not seem surprised. "I'm glad you're glad," he said presently.

"I don't like finishing things either."

To this he said nothing at all, and she realized that her carefully drilled waggishness, which she

kept for callers, would descend upon her in a minute. She struggled against it. She had a forlorn desire to feel real for a few moments, to say things she believed. But of its own accord an archly playful remark popped out.

"Now you mustn't let us bore you, you must feel free to do whatever you want. I think it's dreadful to force guests to be amused."

"I feel awfully free. Don't you?"

This was so unexpected that her mind went quite blank. There seemed no possible reply that was worth making.

"I should like to lie in bed and laugh," he said calmly.

Phyllis tried to think of something to laugh about. It suddenly struck her that there are days when one does not laugh at all. Evidently this was one of them. The world had swinked, and looped its wild orbit for uncountable ages, all to produce this latest moment of lucid afternoon: and yet what cause was there for mirth? But she felt that if she could produce a clear chime of amusement it would be a mannerly and attractive thing to do. She opened her mouth for it, but only managed a sort of satiric cackle.

"You mustn't *try* to laugh," he said. "It's bad for you."

She wondered whether she ought to pretend offence. Of course I'm not really offended: there's something so gently impersonal about his rudenesses. In this dreadful vortex of life that seems to spin us round and round, how amazing to find someone so completely nonchalant, so . . . so untouched by anxiety . . . as though his mind had never been *bruised*. (When she found the right word she always liked to think of it as underlined.)

She had often wondered, hopefully, if she would ever be tempted beyond her strength. Absurd: this was the sort of thing that simply didn't happen to . . . to nice people. But there was a warm currency in her blood, radiant and quivering. She ought to go indoors and lie down . . . lie on her bed and laugh . . . but feeling her knees tremble she remembered that the underskirt was very sheer, and in that violent sunlight, walking across the lawn, he would see an ungraceful bifid silhouette . . . you can't really shock women, but you have to be so careful not to startle men . . . without seeming to pay special attention he was evidently terribly observant. . . . What was it George had said once? that she was so beautiful his eye always enjoyed imagining the lines of her . . . her. . . . No, *body* is a horrid word . . . *her*

figure . . . under her thin dress. George was so carnal. And worse than that, apologetic for it. Mr. Martin isn't carnal . . . and if he were, he wouldn't deprecate it.

"All the things I like are bad for me."

She had said this almost unconsciously, for her mind had gone a long way ahead. She was thinking that if George drove recklessly through a thunderstorm, and the car skidded, and he . . . died . . . passed away . . . on the way to the hospital at Dark Harbour (because the most appalling things do happen sometimes: why, once a flake of burning tobacco blew from George's pipe into his eye, as he was turning a corner, and the car almost went into the ditch) . . . what on earth would she do? Wire to New York for mourning, and would it be proper to keep Mr. Martin in the house after the funeral? The little churchyard on the dunes would be such a picturesque place to bury a husband: sandy soil, too (it seems so much cleaner, somehow) and harebells among the stones. What was that kind of lettering George was always talking about? Yes, Caslon: he would like that—

GEORGE GRANVILLE

IN THE 39TH YEAR OF HIS AGE

Certainly it would never do to have him there after the interment (Mr. Martin, that is). It would have to be at two o'clock so he could get the 3:18 train. Two o'clock makes it rather early, it would interrupt George's nap after lunch. . . .

But Mr. Martin was sitting up looking at her with interest.

"Really?" he was asking. "You feel that way too?"

She had forgotten what she had said; and she couldn't very well say "*What* way?" She must have said something rather good, because he was gazing at her with lively expectancy. His inquisitive eyes, eager brown face, were utterly charming. How fascinating human beings are, she thought: their nice fabricky clothes, their queerly carved faces. She wanted to stretch beside him on the shiny needles, let the sun bake and cook away this horrible curdling sickness that shook inside her; purify all her idiocy in the warm clear pleasure of exchanging ideas. Why even animals can communicate their sensations more cordially than people. Must this fardel of identity always be borne alone?

"Yes," she said, with her perfected smile. She wanted to put her hand on his shoulder, to know if

he was actual. When the whole fire and anger of a woman's life reaches out for some imagined fulfillment, she finds no luxury of phrase to say her pang. She is a movement of nature, a wind that stirs the grass, a moth blundering in the rain. I shall tell him in a minute, I shall tell him, God help me not to tell him. Is this being tempted beyond my strength? But this isn't temptation, this is just Truth. This was God Himself. Weren't we told to love God? Perhaps George would say that biology was just making fun of her. You're not supposed to love more than one person at a time—not in the same way, at least. . . .

"Even Picnics?"

"Don't speak of the Picnic," she said. "I hate to think of it. Damn the Picnic."

He looked startled.

"George made up a limerick once," she said. "It began like this: *I never believed in monogamy, My husband has just made a dog o' me.* But he couldn't find another rhyme."

"What's monogamy?"

"Something terrible," she said, laughing. This was the real laughter she had hoped for. She seemed lifted, purged, held in a twinkling skein of mirth. Laughter, like flame, purifies. Certainly he was adorable, but she couldn't quite make

him out. Why should he, who evidently enjoyed horrifying others, be so suddenly aghast himself? Plainly he was making fun of her: but she could see he was the kind of person who would not try, clumsily, to say the things that ought never to be said. For every woman knows all these things anyway, and prefers to say them herself.

There was a clatter on the veranda, three serial slams of the screen door, quick crunching of gravel, the children. How she loved them, the gay flutter of their short dresses, the brown slender legs gradually paling toward their soft fat little hams. They came running across the lawn, knees lifting and shining in the brilliant light. They surrounded her in a hot laughing group, breathlessly explaining some plan. Daddy was going to take them swimming, if there was a storm they could go into the bath house, it wouldn't matter anyway if they had their bathing suits on, Daddy would play *Moby Dick* the White Whale. The words came tumbling out of them, they seemed packed with words, bursting with a vision of green warm water scalloped with foam, Daddy the White Whale snorting in the surf, the prickling terror of storm darkening the sky. What vitality, what career of the spirit of life!

"Children, children, don't forget your manners. Make a nice curtsy to Mr. Martin."

At once they became well-regulated little dolls. What a picture, she thought: *The Curtsey* . . . the three children bobbing, their mother in the background, supervising as it were: seeing that Life kept within bounds, did no violence to the harmony of the composition. Because (heavens!) it was bad enough for *her* to feel as she did: she couldn't endure the thought of Janet and Sylvia and Rose growing up to such—such disorders. If they were painted like that, curtseying, of course the pose would be difficult to hold. But all poses are difficult to hold.

"I don't know that I like the idea of your bathing with a storm coming on," she said. That was George, putting wild schemes in their heads. If she forbade it now, there would be tears——

"It's what we're all doing, all the time," said George. He had come quietly across the grass while she was showing the children off to Martin.

This was so surprisingly subtle, for George, she scanned him in amazement. He looked like *An Anchor to Windward*, *A Stitch in Time*, *Something Put By for a Rainy Day*. No one ever looked less like a *Leap in the Dark*. In short, he looked like

a Husband: large, strong, reliable, long-suffering, and uninteresting. The best way to look, probably (she thought), for the interesting people have such a painful time.

"It was a telegram from Miss Clyde," he said. "She's coming this afternoon. Same train as the Brooks."

"This afternoon! I thought it was to-morrow."

There was something guilty about George's shrug. He must have told her to come to-day.

"Well, then, George. You'll have to clean up your den right away. And the Brooks are going into the children's room, that bed has got to be fixed. It's all right for Janet, but that spring'll have to be fixed before Ben and Ruth sleep there."

The children's faces were troubled.

"It's all right, little toads," said George. "You go and get your swim anyhow. Mr. Martin can go with you and be the White Whale. I'll come down as soon as I've fixed the beds."

"I haven't any suit," said Martin.

"All the more like the White Whale," said George. "But you can take mine, it's in the bath house."

The children, gaily chattering, led Martin off. Phyllis watched them along the hot pebbly path. Beyond the sundial it curved through shrubbery

to the green wicket gate. Here, up a grassy gully, came the sharp breath of the sea. In a sort of daze her eyes went with them. That little valley, between the tall dunes, was like a channel through which, if the level garden tilted ever so little, all life would sluice out. When the gate opened it would be like pulling the plug in a bathtub. Everything would begin to flow. With a horrid gurgling sound, probably.

George was beneficently silent. Dreamily she found herself following Martin and the children. If she got as far as that tuft of grass without George speaking, she would not need to answer. She was almost there. She was there. She put her foot squarely on it. Then to her surprise she turned and waited. George was filling his pipe. His silence could only mean one thing: he was frightened about something. She felt her advantage come swimming back into her, a thrilling flutter of strength. Yet she was angry at him for not trying to hold and subdue her.

"Well, why don't you say something?"

He blazed with delighted peevishness.

"At least tell me which bed is which?" he shouted.

"Both of them," she said.

Now the others were hidden behind the shrub-

bery. In a minute they'd be through the gate. She drifted swiftly after. There was the place on the gravel where she had found him lying. The pebbles were still scuffed about. But even if the gardener raked the path a thousand times she would never forget that exact spot. They were at the gate. The children were showing him how fine it is for swinging on. All was clear in her mind. She would tell the girls to run ahead, and as they twinkled down the slope she would turn to Martin. Her eyes would tell him everything. . . . No, not everything; but enough to begin with.

Then, *I love you*, she would say. Softly. She whispered it to herself to be sure she had the right intonation. How long was it since she had said that as it should be said, with amazement and terror? Ten years? Why, a woman ought to be able to say it like that—well, every other year anyhow.

"Don't swing on that gate more than one at a time," she called. "You'll break the hinges." And added, to justify herself in Martin's ears, "Remember, chickens, it's not *our* gate."

They turned, surprised to see her following.

"Children," she began, "you run ahead, I want——"

The alert, attentive faces of the little girls were too much for her. They gaped over the palings. They knew (she felt sure) that something queer was happening. They always know, as calmly detached as nurses in a hospital who smile faintly at what the patients say under ether.

She hesitated, looking down at her ankles. How trim and orderly they were; when she put on those white silk stockings this morning she had had no idea of all this happening.

She heard the gate clash to, but still paused, her face averted. She wanted her eyes to reach his slowly. For after that it would be too late to plan things. There was a lonely marching in her blood. Then, trembling, she looked.

He wasn't there. He too had run on with the children. All four, far down the hill, romping to the beach together.

## VII

**G**EORGE was fixing the beds, and making an extra-special crashing and clanging about it for Phyllis's benefit, so she would realize how irritating a job it was. I wonder (he was thinking) if any other man ever had to move furniture about so much? Phyllis has a passion for shifting beds. These springs don't fit the frames. The result is that every time any one turns over there's a loud bang, the corner of the spring comes down clank on the iron side-bar. I fixed it—not perfectly, but well enough—with a pad of newspaper and a length of clothesline, when we moved in. Good enough for the children. But of course for Ben and Ruth. . . .

These can't be the right springs for these beds. It stands to reason no manufacturer would be fool enough to send out a bed that couldn't possibly be put together. There must be some trick of arrangement. Human reason can figure out anything, if concentrated on the problem. Now, let's see. This goes here, and this here. Think of having to fiddle over these picayune trifles when

the whole of life and destiny is thrilling in the balance. He was lying under the bed now, among curly grey rolls of dust, holding up the spring with one hand while the other reached for the hammer.

Phyllis came in, to empty some of the bureau drawers for Ben and Ruth. She was taking away neat armfuls of the children's crisp clean garments. The whole room was full of their innocent little affairs. There, in the corner, was the collapsible doll house he had made last Christmas, and which had to go everywhere with them. Sitting against the door of the doll house was a tiny china puppet with a face of perpetual simper and that attitude of pelvic dislocation peculiar to small china dolls. Around the house was a careful pattern of shells, diligently brought from the beach. Why did all this make his heart ache? He remembered one evening when he had been working late, he passed gently by the children's door about midnight and heard a quiet little cough. Janet was awake. That small sound had suddenly, appallingly, reminded him that these poor creatures too were human. She must be lying there, thinking. What does a child think, alone at night? He went in, in the darkness, put his arms round the surprised child, and whispered encouragements to her. Jay, he said, Daddy's own smallest duckling frog,

Daddy loves you, don't ever forget Daddy loves you. The little figure sat up in bed, threw her arms round his neck and gripped him wildly in furious affection. "I won't forget, Daddy," cried her soft voice in the warm dark room. Though she was only eight years old her accent was strangely mature: the eternal voice of woman calling man back from agonies and follies to her savage and pitying breast.

Mother love? Pooh (he thought, in a glow of bitterness), what was mother love! A form of selfishness, most of the time. Of course they love their children, having borne them, suffered for them. Children are their biological passport, their excuse for not having minds. And if they're girls, how mothers hurry to drill and denature those bright dreaming wits. They love them chiefly because they make so pretty a vignette in the margin of their own self-portrait—like a *remarque* in an engraving. But for fathers to love their children—the poor accidental urchins that come between them and the work they love—that really means something!

He gave the bed frame several resounding bangs with the hammer: quite uselessly, merely to express his sense of irritation at seeing Phyllis's pretty ankles and the hem of her green dress mov-

ing so purposefully about the room. Then, looking out angrily from under the bed, he saw her picking up the shells. Instead of bending over from the hips, as a man would, she was crouching on her heels, deliciously folded down upon her haunches. This annoyed him. And how heartless to clear away the shells that had been laboriously arranged in a border round the doll house.

"Why don't you leave them there?" he shouted. Then he realized how impossible it would be to explain his feeling about the shells. They represented innocence, poetry, the hopeful imaginings of childhood.

Phyllis scooped them up relentlessly.

"Don't be a fool," she said. "You wanted these people here for the Picnic, didn't you? All right, we have to make the room decent."

He felt that, as usual, he had picked up the argument by the wrong end. Arguments are like cats: if you take them up by the tail they twist and scratch you.

"And another thing," she added. "You simply must mend that broken railing on the sleeping porch. If the children are going to be out there it isn't safe."

"I can't fix *both* these beds," he growled. "There's a bolt missing. Tell me which one Ben

will sleep in, I'll fix that. Ruth's won't matter, she's a skinny little thing, doesn't weigh much more than Janet."

I wouldn't mind so much fixing Ruth's bed, he was thinking; there'd be a kind of vague satisfaction in that. I rather like to think of her lying there, she's rather attractive even if she is such a numbskull. But Ben, that solid meaty citizen . . . he probably snores . . . I'll tell Ben to take this one; this is the one most likely to come down.

"How do I know which will take which?" she said. "They'll arrange that to suit themselves, no matter what we say."

He had carefully lashed the spring to the frame with a piece of rope six weeks before. But it had worked loose and now must be done all over again. The deuce of a job: the spring was precariously balanced at one end only; he was holding the loose end with one hand, trying to rewind the cord with the other. The thought of doing all this for Ben was too silly. No, let Ruth have this one and he would try to make a good job of it. Perspiration rolled from him. He supported the spring with his left elbow, so that he could take the end of the cord with his left hand while tightening it with his right. A fuzz of dust was sticking to his moist

cheek. This was too insanely comic: grunting under a bed on a hot electrical afternoon. He could see Phyl's feet standing motionless by the window. How lovely she was, how he wanted her, wanted to slough away all these senseless tensions and stupidities. . . . She was always right because she merely acted on instinct; he, usually wrong, because he tried to think things out and act reasonably . . . if she knew how heroic he really was, would she understand? He *must* get her to understand before it was too late. For this—this crisis that was hanging over them, was his deliberately desired trial of strength. And now, if they weren't careful, they would fritter away all their stamina in preliminary scuffle and nonsense; and when the moment came . . . soon, appallingly soon . . . there would be no vitality left to meet it.

He was terrified. He had planned all this, grimly; now things were moving too fast for him. A long soft murmur of thunder jarred across the sky. Would the storm pass over without breaking? No, by God, it *must* break, if they were ever to find peace. He must send up a kite, like old Ben Franklin (that first of modern advertising men) to bring down a sample of lightning. He must find out whether lightning was the *kind of*

thing you can live with. He must tell her why he was terrified. He must tell her quickly. These were the last moments they would have together before . . . already the colour of the light had changed. Here, on the side of the house away from the water, there was a darkening sparkle in the air.

Her feet were ominously still. She must be thinking, and this always worried him. Suppose she too became aware of this secret insolubility of life? It was only her divine certainty about little things that kept him going. What business have biological units thinking about things? Let them obey their laws and not question.

Shifting the weight of the spring to his shoulder he turned over and put his head out from under the foot of the bed.

"Phyl," he said, "why don't you go and lie down a bit, have a rest before the folks get here."

She looked down at him. Even in the warm listless dream that seemed to have mastered her, she was touched by the foolish appeal in his red, dust-streaked face. Where the light caught the turn of his jaw shone a coppery stubble.

"You need a shave," she said; and then regretted her insistent tidying instinct. She was holding three large shabby dolls, unconsciously

pressing them against her like an armful of real babies. One flopped forward over her arm, uttering an absurd bleating squawk. *Maaa-maa!*

"The children," she exclaimed breathlessly. "The storm's coming. Hurry up with those beds; get the children back from the beach."

"They're all right," he said sulkily. "Mr. Martin'll take care of 'em."

His large flushed face, mouth open, gazed up from the floor. He looked pitifully silly, like a frightened dog. He was thinking, all I want to tell her is that I love her; no matter what happens I love her. But how can I say it? If she weren't my wife I suppose it would be so much easier. Why do we always show our worst side to the people we love?

She was thinking: The absurd idiot, writhing about under that bed like a roach, telling me to go and lie down when there are a hundred things to be done, beds to be made, towels and linen got out, silver counted, instructions to Lizzie. . . . Certainly she had tried to warn him. . . .

"Damn Mr. Martin!" she cried. "Don't trust him. You fool, you fool. Can't you see he's crazy? We're all crazy. Stop sprawling there like a mud turtle, *do something.*"

"Listen, Phyl," he said heavily. "I want to

tell you something. Now, listen, you've got to help me."

With a pang of alarm he knew that now it was too late to go back. He had begun to speak. Now he must try to explain the pillar of smoke and fire that had moved so long before the lonely track of his mind. Greatly as he feared her rigid spirit, he must divide the weight of this heavy fragile burden, like a crystal globe that might contain either ecstasy or horror. He could not know which until it lay broken about him in shining scraps and curves. But oh, why was she so difficult to tell things to?

"Don't laugh," he mumbled. "It's terribly——"

He wriggled forward earnestly. The other end of the metal spring slid from its joist, the head and foot of the bed toppled inward. With a clanking brassy crash the whole thing collapsed about him.

He lay there, covered with bed, in a furious silence which was merely the final expression of his disgust. For an instant, in the stillness following that ridiculous clamour, she thought he was hurt. She bent down, dropping the dolls, and one of these again shrilled its whining protest. His angry face reassured her, and she burst into a peal of laughter.

He crawled out from under the wreck. He was thinking savagely, yet with relief also, how close he had been to telling her. But that was his fate. Even noble tragedy, if it came near him, would be marred by titters. He didn't blame her for laughing. Even in an agony he could never be more than grotesque.

"I was just thinking," she said, "how awful if the bed did that when Ben's in it."

"Don't worry. It probably will."

Sultry blue air pressed close about the house, air heavy with uncertain energies. He knew now how frail are carpentered walls and doors, how brittle a box to guard and fortify weak things he held dear. A poor cardboard doll house, and his own schemes just a ring of shells about it. Here, in a home not even his own, among alien furnitures, he must meet the sorceries of life, treacheries both without and within. Strong walls, strong walls, defend this rebel heart! he whispered to himself—startled and shamed to find himself so poetical. Strange, he thought (hastily reëdifying the bed), that people spend such anguish on decisions that don't really matter. But in this house he was at a disadvantage. He had no memories in it. For Phyllis it had old associations and meanings. It went back into her childhood, into that strange

time when he had never known her; when she must have been so cunningly caught unawares and machined into rigidity. So even the house was against him. In that charged air, one spark surely would sheet all heaven with flame. It would be queer to split open the world's old shingled roofs and rusty-screened windows, scatter the million people with little pig-eyes of suspicion, explode love and merriment over the land. God help us, he thought, people can't even sin without finding dusty little moral justifications for it. This is what civilization has brought us to!—But what a way for a man to be thinking, with a half-written booklet on Summer Tranquillity lying on his desk.

He stepped onto the sleeping porch, where two cots had been put for Janet and Sylvia, to look at the broken railing. Projecting above the veranda, it overlooked the garden and the pale sickle of beach, distinct in glassy light. He could see Martin and the children, tiny figures frolicking on the sand. The sky was piled steeply with swollen bales of storm, scrolls of gentian-coloured vapour. But it looked now as though the gust would pass overhead. Phyllis was busy at the linen closet by the corner of the passage, getting out clean towels and napkins. He envied her the sedative trifles that keep wives sane. And after all, perhaps the

well-drilled discipline of human beings would get them past this eddy. People—and especially guests—know so well what can be done and what can't. They know how to "behave." The world, brave prudent old world, is so sagely adjusted to avert or ignore any casual expression of what men really feel: terror and mockery, pity and desire. Oh, surely, by careful management, they could all shuffle through a couple of days without committing themselves and then safely relapse into the customary drugged routine. Ben and Ruth, accomplished students of petty demeanour, would be a great help. Even Joyce, poor bewitched rebel with frightened eyes, even Joyce must have some powers of concealment. But he would not think of Joyce for a little while.

"I think maybe the storm'll blow over," he called. He felt he must speak to Phyllis again, to calm his own nervousness.

There was no answer. Going to the end of the passage he saw her standing at the big bay window in the spare room. She was looking down toward the beach, one hand nervously plucking at a strip of wallpaper that had come loose along the frame of the window. He crossed the room quietly and kissed the back of her neck, with a vague idea that this would help to keep her from thinking. It was

so enormously important that she should be calm and humorous just now.

He was prepared for silent indifference, or even an outburst of anger; but not for what happened. She turned silently and flung her arms madly about his neck. "Love me, love me, love me," she cried. "Love me, before it's too late."

He was horrified. "There, there," he said, embarrassed. "Go and rest a while, little frog."

## VIII

THE beach was a different world. Under the plum-glossed wall of storm the bay was level, dusky, and still, crumbling in low parallels of surf. The waves collapsed in short flat crashes. The children flashed in the warm dull water: they wore three tight little green bathing suits: their legs so tanned it seemed as though long brown stockings were snugly drawn above their polished knees. They tumbled with the soft clumsy grace of young animals and were happy without knowing it. Janet could swim; Sylvia still used water-wings to buoy her up; Rose preferred not to go beyond knee-depth and squatted in the curl of the small breakers. When the backwash scoured the sand from under her insteps, leaving a hard mound beneath her tickling heels, she squeaked with ecstatic fright. "The ocean's pulling me!" she cried, and squattered to safety. Sylvia, paddling splashily a little farther out, with a white rubber cap and the bulbous wings behind her shoulders, was like a lame butterfly that had dropped from the dunes above. She put a foot

down and couldn't touch bottom. This alarmed her and she hastily flapped herself shoreward. A wave broke on her nape, shot her sprawling into the creamy shallows. The wings spilled off, she rolled sideways and under with legs flying, her nose rubbed along soft ridges of sand. Her face, emerging, was a comic medallion of anxious surprise. Another spread of lacy green water slid round her chin. She was relieved to find herself laughing.

"A wave went right over me and I didn't mind," she exclaimed. "I'm a little laughing girl, and laughing girls are different."

It was all different. In this width of sky and sea and sand nothing was reproached. Nounou was off for the afternoon and could not forbid them to play with the stranger. Farther along the bay were other cottages, other children; but here they were alone. "Do you see those houses?" said four-year-old Rose to Martin, pointing to the bungalows that stood on a bluff, sharp upon naked air. "People live there, with beds and food."

Yet they did not even know they were alone. Merely they existed, they were. They were part of the ocean, which does not think but only fulfils its laws. Tides curve and bubble in, earth receives them, earth lets them ebb. Soft shells pulverize, hard shells polish, sand-hills slither, sea-

weeds dry and blacken: the bay takes the sea in its great arms and is content: and inland the farm-yard dogs, those spotted moralists, are scandalized by the moon. The moon—chaste herself, bright persuasion of unchastity in others. For life is all one piece, of endless pattern. No stitch in the vast fabric can be unravelled without risking the whole tapestry. It is the garment woven without seams.

Here was beauty; and they, not knowing it, were part of it unawares. Here was no thinking, merely the great rhythm of ordered accident, gulls' wings white against thunder, the electric circuits of law broken by the clear crystal of fancy. And the sea, the silly sea, meaningless, prolific, greatest of lovers, brawling over the cold pumice reefs of dead volcanoes, groping tenderly up slants of thirsty sand. The sea that breeds life and the land that breeds thought, destined lovers and enemies, made to meet and destroy, to mingle and deny, marking earth with strangeness wherever they embrace. The sea, the bitter sea, that makes man suspect he is homeless and has no roof but dreams.

Janet, who was big enough to go beyond the low surf and grapple the White Whale in his own element, liked Mr. Martin because he did not talk much and understood the game at once. When she harpooned him he rolled and thrashed in foam,

churning with his flukes as a wounded whale should; and came floating in so they could haul him to land and cut him up for blubber. This, she explained, is the flensing stage, marking out a flat area of moist sand. Then they burned the blubber in a great bonfire, a beacon that glared tawnily in the night, to guide the relief ship to their perilous coast. Martin found it ticklish to be flensed, so they lay and made tunnels. The tide was going, the flat belt of wet beach was like a mirror, reflecting the rich sword-blade colour of the West.

But Martin was a little puzzled.

"What did you say your names are?" he asked again.

"Janet and Sylvia and Rose," they said, delighted at his stupidity. For it is always thrilling to tell people your name: it proves that you too belong to this important world.

Still, this didn't account for the other, the fourth one. He had seen her watching them from the beach, and then she had been playing with them in the tumbling water. He had thought the children just a little bit rude not to greet her when she joined them. She was not as brown as they, so perhaps she was a stranger who had newly arrived. But now, when that heavy thunder rolled like

wagon wheels across a dark bridge of clouds, and the other three ran off to the bath house to dress, she was sitting there beside him.

She was older, but he knew her now. Her face was wet; but of course, for she had been wriggling in the surf like a mermaid. He felt a trifle angry with her: she had got ahead of him, then. He was opening his mouth to speak when she asked him exactly the same thing:

"How did *you* get here?"

He must be careful: if he told her too much she might give him away. She never could keep a secret.

"I've always been here," he said. "It isn't fair for you to tag along. Go home."

Then he realized it was no use to talk to her like that. Why, she seemed older than he: she had even begun to get soft and bulgy, like ladies. But she looked so frightened, he took her hand.

"We can't both do it," he said. "They'll find out. Bunny, you're not playing fair."

"I am, I am!" she cried. "I'm not playing at all. *You* go away. You'll be sorry."

It was awful to see her look so anxious.

"You used to be a laughing girl," he said, "and laughing girls are different. What's happened to *you* anyway?"

She gazed at him strangely, with so much love in her face he felt she must be ill.

"This is no place for you," he said firmly. "Here among strangers. You'll be lonely. I can't look after you."

"They aren't strangers. Oh, please go back before you find out."

This was all senseless and annoying; yet he was sorry for her too. I know what's the matter with her, he thought. He accused her of it.

"No, no!" she said piteously. "No, Martin. Not that. I nearly did, but not really."

"I dare say it wasn't your fault," he said; and then, remembering a useful phrase, "You'll have to excuse me now." He saw Mr. Granville approaching down the sandy ravine. "Here's one of them coming."

"Tell me," she said quickly. "Do you like them?"

"Why, yes, they're nice. They're a bit queer. They seem to worry about things.—They like *me*," he added proudly.

He could see Mr. Granville waving to them to take shelter in the cabin. The bay was already scarred with the onset of the squall.

"Hurry!" Martin said. "Come on, we'll wait in the bath house until the storm's over." They

ran together, stumbling up the heavy sand, she lightly, not dragging behind as she usually did. When he reached the door, pulling it open against the first volley of the rain, it was not her hand that he held, but a cold smooth shell.

## IX

ONE drawback about Pullmans (Ruth was thinking) is that the separate chairs make it difficult to talk. And she was getting restless: if she didn't say something pretty soon she would begin to feel uncertain of herself. The long melancholy howl of the engine, the gritty boxed-up air (still smelling of the vaults under the Grand Central Station), the hot plushy feel of the cushion prickling under her knees, the roll and swing of the car, the dark ridges of hills, everything was depressing and tedious. Ben was still absorbed in the morning paper—already stale, she thought, for the afternoon sheets were out by now. She had skimmed the magazines, a little irritated by the pictures of interiors of wealthy country houses. She wished that such articles would also include photographs of the number of servants necessary to keep things so perfect. Of course it was easy enough for people like that to have a Home in Good Taste: they just call in a decorator and he fixes everything. But you yourself: how are you going to know what is really Good Taste?

Styles change so. As for the fiction, it sounded as though it was written by people with adenoids. You could hear the author biting his nails and snuffling. She had cleaned out her vanity box, thrown away some old clippings and a dusty peppermint and stubs of theatre tickets. And still Ben was lurking behind a screen of print. Certainly he was the most stay-put of men: place him anywhere and there he would remain until it was time for the next thing to happen.

She began filing briskly at her nails. Presently the newspaper rustled uneasily. She leaned forward and rasped sharply, her soft hand moving as capably as a violinist's. The little sickening buzz continued, and Ben folded the paper lengthwise and looked round it like a man at a half-open door. His brown eyes were large and clear behind tortoise-shell glasses. His eyebrows were delicately poised, ready to rise, like guests preparing to get up from their chairs. In his waistcoat pocket were two fountain pens, one black and one with silver filigree on it. He looked faintly annoyed. Whatever he looked, he always looked it faintly: dimly, sluggishly, somewhat. He was a little bit stout, a little bit bald, a little bit tired, a little bit prosperous. *Littlebit* had been his nickname when she fell in love with him and thought

him such a passionate fellow. She used to like the name, but had put it out of her mind when she found it too true. Everything about him was rather, except only his eyes. They were quite. In them, sometimes, you saw a far-off defiance. Something that had always retreated, slipped behind corners, stood warily at half-open doors, but by caution and prudence, not by timidity. Something that went while the going was good.

"Ben," she said. "Did you see that girl sitting at the next table in the diner? The one in the black hat. She came in just before we left."

He thought a moment. "No," he said. "I was looking at the bill."

"She went through here a while ago. She's in the day coaches, I guess, because this is the last of the Pullmans."

No, thought Ben, this isn't the last of the Pullmans, there's another one ahead of it. I noticed it specially when we got on: it's called *Godiva* and reminded me to ask Ruth if she'd brought her bathing suit.—But he refrained from correcting her, waiting patiently to hear what was coming.

"Of course, I'm not sure, it's so long since I've seen her, ages and ages, but I think it was Joyce Clyde."

Ben made a polite murmur of interested surprise,

allowing his eyebrows to stretch themselves a little and pursing his lips gently to show attention. But the name meant nothing to him.

"I shouldn't wonder if she's on her way to the Island too. You remember, she was there one summer when we were all children. I wouldn't have known her, but I saw her picture in a magazine not long ago. She's some kind of artist, I think. She always was a queer kid."

Ben's recollection of old days on the Island was mostly limited to a strip of yellow shore. He remembered catboats and knife-edged grasses, a dock with barnacled piles, learning to make a half-hitch in wet ropes, and the freckled, gap-toothed faces of some other small boys. He remembered splintery plank walks among masses of poison ivy, the puckered white feet of a man who had been drowned, the sour stink of his aquarium of hermit crabs, dead because he forgot to change their water. He remembered an older boy who taught the small fry obscene rhymes. The cheerful disgusting hazards of being young were now safely over, thank goodness. The orderly exacting routine of business was enough to keep a man amused. Twenty-one years is a long time: yet turning the focus of memory a little more sharply he caught an unexpected glimpse of a friendly fat waitress at

the old wooden hotel who used to bring him bowls of clam chowder; and some of the grown-ups were still visible. But the small girls seemed to have evaporated, fogged out. Even Ruth herself. He could only recall a distant shrilling of hide-and-seek played after dusk among the sand-hills, the running flutter of pink cotton dresses. Why don't little girls wear pink nowadays, he wondered.

"Did she wear a pink dress?"

"Gracious, I don't know. She had green eyes and was awfully shy. If that *was* her, she's turned out more attractive than I would have thought. Funny, she hasn't bobbed her hair: I thought all artists were supposed to do that."

Ben wasn't greatly interested. His private conviction was that the party would be a bore anyhow, but he couldn't very well return to the newspaper while Ruth was talking. He took off his glasses and polished them.

"What does her husband do?"

"Her husband? She hasn't got one. I suppose she's wedded to her art. I don't think she's the type that's attractive to men."

Ruth regretted this when she had said it, because obviously a little deduction on Ben's part would have led him to her real thread of thought. But he showed no sign of animation, patted her knee

in a soothing, proprietary way, and settled his coat round him like a dog coiling for another nap.

"We'll soon be there," he said.

"I hope so. I'd forgotten it was such a long ride. It'll be strange to see the Island again. What a queer thing, George getting hold of the old Richmond place. It's been empty a long time, the family never went back to it after the little girl (what was her name?) died."

As though plunging into a tunnel the train drummed into a squall. Grey slants of rain thrashed the windows, there were heavy explosions of sound. Ruth was usually afraid of storms, but this one seemed to make the long green car comfortable. The smooth hum of the train softened the jagged edges of thunder. She would have liked a woman there to talk to about Joyce. She had been cheerful in the certainty that her own hat was the smartest on the train until Joyce (for certainly it was she) entered the dining car. That curly black felt, with what an air she carried it. There was something gipsyish about her: something finely unconscious in her way of enjoying her lunch while every other woman was watching her. Women run in a pack and hasten to ally themselves against any other who seems to have secret funds of certainty. Those who live from hand to mouth

are always indignant at a private income. Ruth knew Joyce at once as one of the lonely kind. While she had been sitting there, apparently idle and half asleep, she had turned her chair to command the aisle and was waiting intently to see her come back through their car.

The delicious resentment that some women at once rouse in others! By deep specialized instinct every woman in the car looked up as the girl went by. Sitting there for several hours they had tacitly constituted themselves a microcosm of Society, and now with professional shrewdness took stock of the alien. No sculptor, no practised sensualist, could have itemized her more fiercely. She was not "pretty," but in some strangely dangerous way she was foreign to their comfortable cowardice. She was still untamed, unbroken. It was not fair, thought the plumper ladies (though unaware they were thinking it), that a woman of nubile age should still combine nymphlike grace with the gay insouciance of a boy. She was carrying her hat in her hand, and the dark twist of her uncropped hair annoyed them as much as, not long before, it would have annoyed them to see it short. They marked the flexile straightness of her figure, the hang and stuff of the skirt, the bend of foot and ankle; exactly appraised, by the small visible slope

of stocking, the upper curves unseen. They noted the unbroken fall of her dark suit from armpit to hem as she was swung sideways by a swerve of the train and threw up one elbow to keep her balance. The ruddy young brakeman, meeting her just then, steadied her politely with his hand. She smiled as frankly as a lad. She didn't even seem humiliated, Ruth thought, at having to pass through all these Pullmans on her way to the day coaches.

But there was something deeper than that—something she couldn't profitably discuss with Ben. With the clairvoyance of woman she saw, and resented, a creature somehow more detached and more determined than herself. In a vague way, for which no words were possible, she recognized a spirit not more happy but more finely unhappy; a spirit concerned with those impassioned curiosities of life which Ruth knew existed and yet knew not how to approach. She felt the shamed envy and anger that some bitter listener in the audience always feels toward the performer. There was something in that dark childish face and alert reckless figure that made Ruth feel soft and frilly and powdered with sugar. The girl was possessed by some essence, had some fatal current passing through her—something which, if generally admitted, would demand extensive revision of the

comfortable world. That was it, perhaps: she looked as though she knew that things most women had agreed to regard as important, didn't really matter. The Pullman microcosm resented this, as an anthology of prose would resent a poem that got into it by mistake. The only satisfaction it could have, and the explanation of its pitiless appraisal, was the knowledge that this poor creature too was mocked and fettered with a body, subject also to the dear horrors of flesh.

With a sense of weariness and self-pity Ruth turned to the window and saw, far off, the hard blue line of sea. They were emerging from the storm, the train hummed and rocketed over marshes and beside reedy lagoons still prickled by the rain. On that horizon lay the memory of childhood to which she was now returning. The chief satisfaction of revisiting juvenile surroundings is to feel superior to that pitiable era: to appear, before one's old companions, more prosperous, circumstantial, handsome, and enviable than they might have expected. But now even her gay little woollen sports hat seemed to have lost its assurance. What right had a mere illustrator (and riding in a day coach) with something proud and eager in her face, to start all these troublesome thoughts? She remembered that even as a child

Joyce never really joined in their games but watched apart with a shy unwillingness: a shyness which, if rubbed too hard, could turn into bewildered rebellion. Ruth was always so intensely conscious of the existence of other people that a merely random speculation as to what her friends were doing could prevent her all day long from concentrating on her own affairs. Others were more real to her than herself. Now she was painfully haunted by that look of conviction and fulfilment on the girl's face. Joyce looked unhappy (she consoled herself a little with that); but it was a thrilling kind of unhappiness: an unhappiness scarcely to be distinguished from ecstasy.

She pondered about this, wondering if *she* had ever looked like that? One of her secret anxieties was that she herself was not passionate. Was that, she sometimes wondered, why she and Ben had never had children? In her absorption she practised an expression on her face . . . "rapt" was the word that occurred to her to describe it. Ben, reappearing from behind the paper, was alarmed by her appearance and offered her a soda-mint tablet from the little bottle in his waistcoat pocket.

The dense air of the car began to be alive. After the barrens of pinewood and long upgrades over

stony pasture, now the train careered gloriously in the salty northern air, along beaches crusted with stale foam. It cried aloud, its savage despairing chord: as though the fierce engine knew that after all its furious burning labours, the flashing uproar of its toil, its human employers would descend at their destinations unfreed, unaltered, facing there as elsewhere the clumsy comedies of life. Angrily it exulted along the bright dwindle of rails which spread wide under the great wheels and narrowed again before and behind. The telegraph poles came racing toward it, leaping up like tall threatening men; one by one they were struck down and fled away. With swift elbowing pistons and jets of silver steam the engine roared, glorious in its task; glorious in its blind fidelity and passion, caring nothing that all must be retraced in the opposite direction to-morrow.

Joyce was standing in the vestibule of *Godiva*, smoking a cigarette. She had been there a great part of the journey; fast trains always made her mind too busy for sitting still. She had pacified the at first disapproving young brakeman by getting out her sketchbook and making a quick cartoon of him.

Not for many weeks had she been so unconsid-

erily happy. She never thought of trains as hurrying toward something but rather fleeing wildly *from*. Those great eloquent machines (she hated to have to board a train without seeing the engine first) crouched ready for flight like huge beasts breathing panic. They were symbols of the universal terror; she trembled with excitement to feel the thrill of escape—escape from anything. Escape, for the moment, from Time and Space. She wondered how any one could ever sleep or be bored in a train. You'd think their faces would be transfigured when they got out. She hummed to herself as she stood alone in the vestibule. Life seemed to be beginning all over again: her mind was freshly sensitized to the oddity of human faces, to the colour and vitality of the country, the strong swelling curves of the hills. I am flying, flying, she chanted; I am flying from a dream. I am a little mad. My mind is fuller than it'll hold: all sorts of thoughts are slopping over the brim, getting lost because there isn't room for them. I must let them flow faster so I can be aware of them all. What happens to the thoughts that get spilt before you can quite seize them? I must ask George. . . . I wonder which George it will be?

Once she had startled him by giving him a book

she found in a second-hand store, *The Four Georges*. For it amused her to insist that there were four of him: George the Husband, George the Father, George the Publicity Man, and then George the Fourth—*her* George, the troubled and groping dreamer, framed in an open window. . . .

Go and see Granville, said the Advertising Agent to her. He's getting up a booklet for the L or somebody. He might be able to use some of these drawings of yours. And because it was urgent he had given her the address. Her knees were quivery as she turned the bend in the corridor, looking for his number.

It was a sultry day, the door of the little office was open. There was a window, high up at the back of the old building, looking over the Brooklyn Bridge. He was leaning on the sill, the smoke of his pipe drifted outward into that hot tawny light that hangs over the East River on summer afternoons. At first he did not seem to hear her tap on the glass panel; then he turned, glanced at her steadily and without surprise. As he had no idea she was coming she thought perhaps he had mistaken her for someone he knew.

"Look here," he said, "I want to show you something."

She put down her folder of drawings and crossed to the sill. He leaned there in his shirt sleeves, pointing with the stem of his pipe, as easily as though they were old friends.

"See those tall lance-headed openings in the piers of the Bridge? Did you ever notice they look just like great cathedral windows? And that pearl-blue light hanging in them, better than any stained glass."

She was too surprised, too anxious about showing him her drawings, to do more than murmur assent.

"I can tell you about it," he said, "because I don't know you. It isn't safe to tell people you know about beautiful things. Those are the windows of my private cathedral."

How often she had lived again that first encounter. The ring of feet along the paved corridors, the blunt slam of elevator gates, the steady tick of a typewriter in an adjoining office, telephones trilling here and there in the big building like birds in an aviary, the murmur of the streets rising up to them through warm heavy air. Always, in that city, she was a little mad. Where such steep terraces cut stairways on sky, where every tread falls upon some broken beauty poets are too hurried to pick up, how can one be quite

sane? God pity the man (George said once) who has none of that madness in his heart.

I have a cathedral too, I have a cathedral too, she was repeating to herself, but too excited to say it. With bungling fingers she untied the portfolio, rummaged through the drawings, found the one of an aisle of trees in Central Park where the wintry branches lace themselves into an oriel.

He went through all the pictures. He only spoke twice.

"Who did these? You?" and then presently, "Here, this isn't fair. You've been trespassing in my city."

Then suddenly he paused, flushed, and became embarrassed. He became—as she would have said afterward—George the Third. He spoke of the Elevated Railroad's limited appropriation for promotion, of the peculiar problems of transportation publicity, asked what was her usual price for art work, took her name and address. . . . Perhaps George the Fourth would have died then and there, perished of cholera infantum at the age of half an hour, never been heard of again except on a tablet in the imaginary cathedral on Brooklyn Bridge . . . but as she left the office she shook so with purely nervous elation she had to stop by the brass-rimmed letter chute in

the hall. She was wishing she had the courage to go back and ask him how soon the check could come through (Will he mail it here? she thought. Oh, blessed chute!) . . . and then he came hurrying round the corner after her.

"Look here," he said, with pink-browed uncertainty, "I can't let you go away like this. The family's off in the country. I'm devilish lonely. Will you have dinner with me and we can talk about New York?"

She was too amused and exultant to answer promptly. But George the Fourth, looking anxiously from his bassinette, need not have been so afraid she was going to refuse. Do artists who have just made their first real sale decline a square meal?

"We'll ride uptown in the L, to celebrate," he pleaded. "There's a bit where it turns right into the sunset for a few blocks; if you stand on the front platform it's corking. And I know a place where we can get a bottle of *asti spumante*. . . ."

The lighted candles of the Italian basement where they dined. At first his shyness had come back upon him: he seemed to feel that taking any one but Phyllis out to dinner was an incredible truancy. Then, as they looked anxiously at each other, some element in the blood broke free. His

mind came running to her like a child, like a boy lost in a world of tall stone buildings and clamouring typewriters. His poor shivered ideas just fitted into the fractured edges of her own. He had been well drilled, but there was in him a little platoon that had broken away from the draft and enlisted in the Foreign Legion.

"You know," he said, "I never talked like this to any one before. What is there about you that makes one say what he really thinks? My mind feels as though someone had stolen its clothes while it was in bathing. How will it be able to go back to work to-morrow?"

Warm golden candlelight and cold golden wine: the little table in the corner was a yellow island in a sea of cigarette smoke, a sunny silence in the comforting hum of other people's chatter. In her own loneliness she saw his mind like the naked footprint on Crusoe's beach.

There must have been another footprint there too: the footprint of a mischievous godling who runs the beaches of the world as naked as Man Friday.

"The ideas I folded neatly and hid under a stone" (she could still hear him saying it, there was something delightfully heavy in his way of

saying *stone*), "the ideas I thought you have to leave behind when you go bathing in the river of life, I think maybe I shall go back and look under that stone for them and see if they aren't the most important of all. I thought they were just clothes. Maybe they were my bathing suit."

The figure of speech wasn't quite limpid. There was perhaps a little *asti spumante* in it, and a few gassy bubbles of exaggeration. But she understood what he meant. Ten, eleven years older than she, how young he seemed.

He paused awhile, getting younger every moment. He waved away a drift of smoke.

"You must meet Phyllis," he said.

Then he had found, later, that it wasn't necessary, for she had known Phyllis as a child. How small the world is, he said sadly. "Phyllis and I were small, too," she replied.

She wondered if there were four Phyllises also?

"Ten minutes to Dark Harbour," said *Godiva's* porter, coming into the vestibule with his whisk brush. She hardly noticed him dusting her, she was thinking of George the Fourth, the perplexing phantom she had accidentally startled into life. She felt for him a strange, almost maternal ten-

derness; an amusement at some of his scruples, an admiration at the natural grace of his mind when he allowed himself to be imaginative. But behind these, a kind of fear: for George the Fourth had grown gigantic in her dreams; sometimes, in panic, she realized how much she thought about him. He was so completely hers because he was hidden in the securest of hiding places—inside a person who belonged to someone else. So she couldn't resist the invitation to go down to the Island, to renew memories of childhood . . . and the most interesting of those ghostly children, she thought, would be George the Fourth, only twelve months old. She had had to remind herself, sometimes, that the first three Georges did belong to others . . . but if you have to keep reminding yourself of a thing, perhaps it isn't so. For the amazement had been mutual. She had awakened George the Fourth, but he had awakened someone too. . . . And frightened by these thoughts (it had been her lonely pride to stand so securely on her own feet) she was flying from the dream of George to George himself—and Phyllis.

Over the wide sea meadows the train sounded its deep bluster of warning: a voice of triumph, a voice of pain, announcing reunions that can-

not unite, separations that cannot divide. And George Granville—all four of him, at that moment—driving over the long trestle to the mainland, heard it from afar, and in sheer bravado echoed the cry with his horn.

**I**N THE bathtub Phyllis wondered, for the first time in her life, whether she was "literary." She sat soaping her knees and revelling in coolness that came about her waist in a perfection of liquid embrace. She found herself—perhaps because her eye had fallen on the volume in the den, while she and George were bickering—thinking about Shakespeare. Now, in an intimate understanding that many an erudite scholar has never attained, she perceived what the man with a beard was driving at. The plays, which she had always politely respected as well-bred women do respect serious institutions, were something more than gusts of fantastic tinsel interspersed with foul jokes—jokes she knew were foul without understanding them. They were parables of the High Cost of Living—the cost to brain and heart and spirit of this wildly embarrassing barter called life. The tormented obstreperous behaviour of his people was genuine, after all: they were creatures in a dream, like herself; a dream more true than reality. She could have walked on in any

of the plays and taken a part without sense of incongruity. She felt as if she were a phantom in one of the pieces: a creature in the mind of some unguessable dramatist who had mysteriously decided to make a change in the plot. She thought how she and her friends had sometimes sat through Shakespeare matinées, subconsciously comforting themselves with the notion that real people don't behave that way.

Why, Bill, you poor old devil (she said to him) how you must have suffered to be able to write like that. It made her feel quite tranquil by comparison. But of course her own particular absurdities had special kinks in them that were unique: even He would have been surprised. But he would have understood.

A soft flow of air had begun to move after the storm. The big maple tree, just outside the bathroom window, was gold-plated in the dropping sun. The window was above the bath and the ripple of those gilded leaves reflected a gentle shimmer into the porcelain tub. Her shiny knees were glossed with pale green light. Shakespeare would have liked that. She fished for the soap, which slipped round behind her like a young thought.

I suppose that as long as I was 99 and  $\frac{44}{100}$  pure

I never could appreciate him. But I don't know whether I altogether enjoy people who understand so well. That's the trouble about George: he's getting weirdly acute, poor soul. Now, Mr. Martin: he looks divinely sympathetic, but I don't think he quite . . . People wonder why one always confides in those who don't understand. But of course! To confide in people who *do* is too terrible. Giving yourself away—yes, exactly: you no longer are keeper of your own gruesome self. That's why the Catholic notion is so sound: confession to God is nothing at all, you know He doesn't care. But to confess to a priest . . . golly, that must take courage.

She lay down for one last lustral wallow, closing her eyes with a calm sensation of new dignity and refreshment. The cool water held her in peaceful lightness, lifting away whatever was agitated and strange. For a moment body and spirit were harmoniously one, floating in a pure eddy of Time. I feel like a nun, she thought. She rose, trickling, threw the big towel round her shoulders, and studied herself in the long mirror. Really, I'm not much more than a child, she mused happily, admiring the slender, short-haired figure in the glass. Or perhaps I feel like a harlot . . . a courtesan, nicer-sounding word. Discarding the

towel she struck a humorous parody of the Venus Aphrodite attitude, and then felt a little shocked. She could feel her cheeks warming. She remembered George's coarse remark when they saw the statue. "It's no use," he said. "Two hands can't do it. Any one as timid as that needs three." She sang a little refrain, trying different tunes for it. She couldn't remember whether she had heard it, or just made it up:

*What did Mrs. Shakespeare do  
When William went away?*

The soft flutter of maple leaves outside the window was like a soothing whisper. From the other side of the house she could hear the click of croquet mallets and balls. Time for the children to have their supper, or they won't be finished before the others get here. Thank goodness it was cooler, Lizzie wouldn't be so harassed. Wrapping her silk kimono round her, she looked out of the window. Lizzie's flag was still flying. With a rough delicacy of her own, the cook did not like to run out her private washing on the family line, so she had strung a cord from the kitchen door to a branch of the maple tree. There, floating like a hoist of signal buntings, were Lizzie's personalia: all the more conspicuous for her mis-

taken modesty. They were indeed (it was George who had said it) like a string of code flags: a blue apron, a yellow shirt, a pair of appalling red breeches. George always wanted to know to whom Lizzie might be signalling with these homely pennants. They *are* a kind of signal, Phyllis thought. A signal that life goes on, notifying any other household within eyeshot that here too the humble routine of kitchen and washtub and ironing board, of roof and meat and sleep, triumphs in the end over the wildest poet's dream. Shakespeare would have relished them, and been pleased to see these bright ensigns hoisted so frankly in the yellow air.

Dressed in a gauzy drift of white and silver, she paused at the cushioned bay windows by the head of the stair. Her body enjoyed that mixed feeling of snug enclosure and airy freedom which is the triumph of feminine costume. Even her inward self shared something of this sensation: within the softly sparkling raiment of thought she was aware of her compact kernel of identity—tranquil for the moment, but privately apprehensive and alert. On the oval grass plot Martin was playing croquet with the children. Janet, nicely adjusting two tangent balls with a bare brown foot, gave them a well-aimed swipe. Phyllis heard the

sharp wooden impact and Martin's cry of good-humoured dismay as his globe went spinning across the turf, leaving a darker stripe on the wet lawn. It bounded over the gravel and into the bushes, right by the corner where she had first seen him. She watched him chase it, lay it on the edge of the turf, and drive it back. How graceful he was! He raised his head with a little unconscious lift of satisfaction as he watched the ball roll where he wanted it to lie.

A film seemed to have been skimmed from her eyes. Perhaps it was that level stream of evening light: the figures moved in a godlike element of lustre: every motion was perfect, expressed the loveliness for which life was intended, was unconscious and exact as the movements of animals. They were immersed in their game as though there were no past, no future: she felt she could watch them for ever. Martin's face, gravely intent, bent over his ball. She saw the straight slope of his back against the screen of shrubs. The mallet clicked, there was a sharp tinkle as the ball went through the middle hoop, touching the little bell that hung there. How can any one look so charming and yet be so hard to talk to?

Through the scooped hollow of the dunes, catching tawny sparks from the sand, violet dazzles from

the sea, the cleansed radiance of sunset came pouring in. The children's bare legs splashed in brightness as though they were paddling; honey-coloured light parted and closed again about their ankles, the wet shadows dripped and trailed under their feet. The house, growing dusky, was a dyke stemmed in the onset of that pure flood. It caught and held as much darkness as it could; the rest went whirling out. As if in answer to the little croquet bell, the old clock in the hall whirred and jangled six hoarse clanking strokes. They eddied a moment and then were whiffed away by the strong, impalpable current that seemed to be sweeping through. You could tell, by the dull sound, that the gong was rusty. No wonder, a house by the seashore, empty so long.

After the cough of the clock silence came up the shaft of the stairway. Not themselves alone, but the house too, had its part in everything. She could feel its whole fabric attentive and watchful, and wondered how she could have been heedless of this before. A house of ugly pattern, with yellow wainscots and fretsawed mantels and panes of gaudy glass: but she guessed now, what one can only learn under strange roofs, how precious houses are. And how wary they have to be, fortresses

against fierce powers, sunshine, darkness, gale. Life has flowed through them: clocks have chimed, logs crumbled, stairs creaked under happy feet. These whispers are all they have to treasure: if you leave them alone too long they get morbid, full of sullen fancies. She remembered herself, visiting that house as a child, once seated at this same window, watching others play croquet . . . *was* it memory, or only the trick of the mind that splits the passing instant and makes one live it twice?

"Come, children!" she called from the window. "Time for your supper."

She went slowly down the stairs. Be calm, be calm, she said to herself; this too will pass; this isn't Shakespeare but only the children's supper time. But the flow of her blood warmed and quickened as water grows hot while you wait with your hand under the bathroom faucet. On the landing, where a shot of sunlight came arrowing through from the sitting-room window, she waited to adjust a slipper. She could hear them on the gravel outside. If he came in now he would find her just so, gilded and silvered like a Christmas card. But their voices remained on the veranda where the children's meal was laid. She could not

afford to wait long. Now, now, were a few precious moments. This was a dream: and dreams must be recorded at once or they vanish for ever.

She heard one of them sneeze. It was Janet: she knew all their sneezes and coughs by ear. Yes, they probably *have* caught cold, bathing in that storm. And they have to sleep outdoors to-night, too: on the porch, because of this infernal Picnic. It's much colder; the thermometer must have dropped twenty degrees. She hurried to get the sweaters from the cupboard under the stairs.

They were sitting at the veranda table, with milk and bread and jam. Mr. Martin was in the fourth chair. He looked as though he too was ready for supper.

"Well, chickabiddies, did you have a good bathe? I hope you didn't catch cold. Here, put on your sweaters."

They looked up at her gaily. Their upper lips were wet and whitish.

"How pretty you look!" exclaimed Janet.

She had meant to toss him a brief, clear, friendly little gaze; an orderly hostess-to-pleasant-guest regard; but this from Janet startled her. She could see that he was holding her in his eye, meditating the accuracy of Janet's comment. She did not feel ready to face him.

"Thank you," she said lightly. And added, "Wipe your mouths after drinking."

"He says that's a milk moustache," cried Rose, gesturing to the visitor. "It makes you healthy."

Phyllis made a clucking reproach with her tongue.

"You mustn't point. It's not polite to say *he*. Say 'Mr. Martin.' Jay dear, after supper run and put away the mallets. I've told you, I don't know how often, not to leave them lying on the lawn. . . . Oh, not *you*, Mr. Martin. Janet'll do it after her supper."

But he was up already and gone to get them. I suppose this perpetual correcting sounds silly to him, she thought. But how can I help it? George never disciplines them.

"It makes him hungry to watch us eat," said Sylvia. "He wants some supper."

"He's joking with you. We'll have ours by and by."

She followed him into the garden. As she put her crisp silver slipper on the tread of the veranda steps she saw how the foot widened slightly to carry her weight. How terribly I'm noticing things. Something flickered at the corner of her eye: she suspected it was Lizzie, at the pantry window, trying to attract her attention. A throng

of trifles jostled at the door of her mind, tapping for admission. Probably the ice has given out, after such heat. Well, then, they'll have to do without cocktails. I can fix the sandwiches to-night when everyone's in bed. If it turns chilly there won't be enough blankets. Nounou won't be back until late, I must get the children started to bed before . . . I *won't* think of these things.

He had put away the croquet implements.

"Thank you. We've just time for a little stroll before the others get here.—I hope you'll like Mr. and Mrs. Brook. They're extremely nice, really, but a bit heavy."

"Perhaps they eat too much." He said it with the air of one courteously offering a helpful suggestion.

She had wanted, wanted so to be alone with him: she had a desperate feeling that there were urgent things to be said, and now she could utter nothing. Her mind ran zigzagging beside her, like a questing dog, while she tried to steer their talk into some channel of reality. Her thoughts kept crowding massively under her uneasy words, pushing them out before they were ready, cutting into her speech like italics in a page of swarthy Roman type.

"We all eat too much in hot weather, I dare say. *Oh, if I could only write him a letter I could make him understand. He's so sophisticated, I suppose the quaint things he says are his way of making fun of me. Why did I suggest our walking like this? You can't see a person's face when you're walking side by side. And if we go round the path again, Lizzie will get me from the pantry. Let's sit down on the bench.*"

"It's wet, it'll spoil your pretty skirt."

Skirt! . . . What a word for this mist of silvery tissue she had put on specially for him. . . .

"So it is. Well, let's see what the storm has done to the roses."

The little walk under the trellis was flaked with wet petals.

"Poor darlings, there's not much left of them now. *If Shakespeare was here I should feel the same way. Speechless. Why, he's like a god: lovely to think about, impossible to talk to. He doesn't give anything, just absorbs you: you feel like a drop of ink on a blotter. I have a horrid suspicion that the ice has given out, you mustn't mind if your cocktail is warm.*"

He kept looking at her in brief glances. Each time she met them it was like getting a letter in

some familiar handwriting but stamped with a strange postmark.

"Are they better cold?"

*I give up, I give up. It's no use. I can't even think. There's some sort of veil, mist, between us. He is a kind of god. He's brightness, beauty. Every movement he makes is a revelation and a question. How can I speak to him when all I want is to love him. There's nothing earthy, nothing gross about this. It's lovelier than anything I ever dreamed of. And if I tried to tell any one it would sound like tawdry farce. . . .*

Dimly she divined what lay between them, what always lies between men and gods, making them such embarrassed companions—the whole of life, the actual functions of living; the sense of absurdity (enemy of all tender beauty); trained necessities for silence, that darken the intuitions of the soul.

*It's as impossible as—as the New Testament. I feel like Christmas Eve: there's a new Me being born. You can't have a Nativity without pangs. And not even any one to bring me frankincense and myrrh . . .*

She stopped, picked one of the late rosebuds, and put it in his lapel. She checked a frightened impulse to tell him that she named the baby Rose

because it was her favourite flower and she looked so like a rosebud when she was born. This was courage, because to say it would have carried on the doomed conversation one paragraph farther in safety. To any one else she would have said it. But now she spoke shakently, from far within.

"You're not easy to talk to—Martin."

His face changed, he looked less anxious. He took her hand. She found herself not surprised: it seemed entirely natural. She felt his fingers lace into hers. Just as Janet does, she thought.

"I get frightened when people talk to me," he said.

She looked at him, worshipping. The bad spell was broken. Instantly she felt they could communicate. He was frightened too—the precious! Over his shoulder she caught sight of the little old-fashioned weather vane on the stable, a gilded galloping horse with flowing tail. Always racing in blue emptiness and never getting anywhere. Like Time itself; like this marvellous instant, so agonizingly reached, that could never come again. No one who knew her in her daily rote would quite have recognized her then as she looked into his eyes. She was completely herself, born again in innocence, in the instinctive yearning for what she knew was good. The unknown ripeness of

woman woke for an instant from its long drug of peevish days, small decisions, goaded nothings. Humbled, purified, bewildered, she saw the dark face of Love, the god too errant for heaven and who suffers on earth like a man.

“Martin, I love you.”

“I love you too,” he said politely.

Beyond the stable she heard the sound of the car.

## XI

**I**T WAS just adorable of you to come."

Ruth was getting out of the car. They kissed.

"Why, Phyllis! How sweet you look! Gracious: I thought this was a Picnic, and here you are in a dance frock. For Heaven's sake lead me to hot water. Those awful Pullmans; I'm simply speckled with cinders. I feel gritty all over."

That, of course, must be Miss Clyde, on the front seat.

"How do you do! After all these years! I don't suppose we'd have known each other. But we ought to, George admires your work so much."

They shook hands. It was a hard, capable little hand, calloused like a boy's. Phyllis knew now that she remembered the grey-green eyes: agates, gold-flecked, with light behind them. Eyes softly shadowed underneath, as though from too much eagerness to understand; eyes dipped in darkness. The small shy child of long ago, who stood apart from games. How many strange moments had both been through since last they met?

George was getting out the suitcases. He was afraid to watch Phyllis and Joyce greet. When a finely adjusted balance hovers in equilibrium you don't breathe on the scales.

"We were on the same train," cried Ruth, "and never recognized each other."

Ben felt the twinge of anxiety common to the husband who hears his wife tell an unnecessary fib. Ruth had said this once before already, in the car, so perhaps it was important. Her allusion to Pullmans, also, was based (he suspected) on the erroneous notion that Miss Clyde had ridden in a day coach. But he liked to back Ruth up, if he knew what she was heading for.

"I guess we've all changed," he said mildly. "The old house hasn't, it looks just the same."

"Miss Clyde's brought her paint box," George said. "She's going to do a picture."

"Oh, yes, and we have another—why, that's fine, Miss Clyde—we have another artist here too, Mr. Martin. You must all come in and meet him."

She stood holding the screen door aside, welcoming them in. George, coming last, saw how her cheerful smile faded to expressionless blank when the guests had passed. She had relapsed into automatic Hostess. How lonely she must be to look like that. I wish it was over, he thought.

His mind felt like a spider that has caught several large flies at once: the delicate web was in danger of breaking.

They entered the hall.

"It isn't changed a bit!" Ruth said. "Exactly as I remember it—except it seems smaller. That old table, for instance, that used to be just enormous. Well, hot water first. I can sentimentalize much better when I'm clean."

George was thinking: Ruth's probably the kind of woman who always twists the toothpaste tube crooked, but her babble will help us around corners.

"I hope Miss Clyde won't mind being in the little sitting room downstairs: you see we're just camping out here, you must all make yourselves at home."

Joyce tried to frame some appropriate reply to Phyllis's clear, faintly hostile voice. She was in the tranced uneasiness of revisit. Coming from the station she had been trying to realize the Island again: her mind was startled by the permanence of the physical world. Things she had not thought of for so long—things that she had apparently been carrying, unawares, in memory—were still there, unaltered, reproaching her own instability. The planks of the station platform, the old scow

rotting in the mud, the road of crushed oyster shells, the same vacancy of sand and sky.

In the car she and George were both achingly mute. There seemed to be a sheet of glass between them. The Brooks emitted cheerful chatter from the back seat, George replied with bustling geniality, his only mask. How wonderful if they could just have made this ride in silence; she had a feeling that all sorts of lovely meanings were escaping her. There was the notch of blue light where the road slipped over a prickling horizon of pines. How just right were the slopes of the puppy-coloured sand-hills, the tasselled trees against the pure lazy air, the coloured veining of the fields. Now, now; here, here; I'm here and now, she had to remind herself. It's God's world, whatever that can mean. Golly, you must be careful how you make fun of religion: it's a form of art. She imagined a painting of that aisle of sandy road, climbing through the tall resiny grove. *Religion* would be a good name for it. —George had never seemed so far away as now when she sat beside him. Would it always be like that? Oh, teach yourself not to love things, she thought. Be indifferent. It's love that causes suffering, it's tenderness that weighs heavy on the heart. How ridiculous to say that God loves the world,

He doesn't give a damn about it, really. That's why He's so cheerful . . . such a competent artist. His hand doesn't shake. Still, I don't think I want to meet Him. It's a mistake to meet artists you admire; they're always disappointing.

"I shouldn't have come here," she said. "I love it too much. Those trees. They look so surprised. I have a guilty passion for pine trees."

Driving the faithful car had strengthened George. Even the paltriest has an encouraged sense of competence with that steady tattoo underneath his feet. The artist that lay printed like a fossil in George's close-packed heart—the artist that only Joyce had ever relished—always responded to the drum of the engine. He adored the car; when he drove alone to the Island (sending the family by train) he sang to her most of the way. This was *his* guilty passion. Now it was the car's rhyming vitality that came to his rescue. He broke the glass. He cut himself, but he got through.

"Any kind of love is too much," he said.

Then he was grieved to find himself uttering such a cheap oracle; but it comforted Joyce because she saw it was a symptom. It showed that he was trying to tell the truth. She did not dare

look at him: she was too conscious of the others behind them, who seemed as massively attentive as an audience in a theatre. Then in a wave of annoyance, Surely I have a right to look where I want? She did so. She could see the confidential tilt of his eyebrow so plainly, she knew he was hers for the taking. Nothing but themselves could stand between them.

"How queer: that's just what I was thinking," she told the eyebrow.

"Oh, do you believe in telepathy?" chirped Ruth. "Ben sometimes knows exactly what I'm thinking without my saying a word."

It can't happen often, George thought.

"What were you laughing at?" he found time to ask her, as the others were descending from the car.

"I was just thinking, there's not much danger of my meeting God, because I'm not pure in heart."

"Oh, I shall be perfectly comfortable anywhere," she said.

The single swathe of sunshine carved the hall, dividing it into two dusks as the word *Now* divides one's mind. All, all unchanged: the series of hemispherical bronze gongs at the dining-room

door, the wakeful asthma of the tall clock, the wide banistered stairway with its air of waiting to creak. The soft, gold-sliced shadow trembled with small sounds, and light voices of children drifted down from above. If this was still real, then what was her life of to-day? Why pretend any longer to make the world seem reasonable? It was all a delightful ironic farce with an audience applauding the wrong moments and the Author gritting his teeth in the wings. What use was Time if it availed so little?

The broad stream of sunlight flowed through the house like a steady ripple of Lethe, washing away the sandy shelves of trivial Now, dissolving little edges of past and future into its current, drawing all Time together in one clear onward sluice. What are we waiting for, she wondered. What is everyone waiting for, always? She was painfully aware of George standing near her. It was not silence that sundered them, but their grotesque desire to speak.

"George," Phyllis was saying, "you give Ben a drink or something while I take the ladies——"

In the shadow beyond the table there was a clicking sound. Through the wide opening of the dining-room double doors two figures crawled, on all fours, with a toy train. Janet was in her

pyjamas, ready for bed. Martin's hand moved the engine across the floor. They came into the stripe of sunset.

"Wait a minute!" cried Janet. "Here's one of the passengers."

"Put him in," said Martin. "And then the train goes round a sharp curve and smashes into a lot of people, bing!"

"Quick, I'll telephone for a nambulance. You adbreitized Perfect Safety on this railroad. It said so in your booklet."

"Well, if people will sit down for a Picnic right on the main line——"

"Goodness, what a nasinine thing to do."

"They were using the hot rails to fry their bacon on."

"Here's the doctor. Are there any children hurt?"

"Children all safe," said Martin, looking carefully through the wreckage. "A lot of grown-ups badly damaged."

"Here's the pistol. Put them out of their misery."

"Bang-bang-bang!"

"They didn't suffer much. I'll go for the wrecking train."

"Janet!" exclaimed Phyllis. "What are you *doing*, running about the house in your pyjamas. And you've got sniffles already."

The two players looked up; but they could see nothing outside their tunnel of brightness. The voice seemed like imagination.

"Of course the railroad company will have to pay money for those valuable lives," said Martin regretfully.

"I'll get the blocks, we can build a orphan asylum for the surveyors."

"Not surveyors, survivors."

"Janet! Say good-night to Mr. Martin and run upstairs."

This time the command was unmistakable. Janet became aware of tall ominous figures emerging from the surrounding dusk.

"Good-night!" she cried hastily, and ran.

"I'm afraid Janet's manners are terrible," Phyllis said. "She ought to have shaken hands, but I don't like to call her back now, she'll catch more cold."

Two other forms appeared at the top of the stairs.

"Is to-morrow the Picnic?" they called anxiously.

Martin was still sitting on the floor, musing over the disaster. Janet halted halfway up and shouted. "He says you said Damn the Picnic."

Sylvia and Rose burst into snivels. There was a moment of difficult pause. Martin realized that something was happening and began collecting the train.

"You *promised* the Picnic for to-morrow," he said, looking up from where he was kneeling.

"Yes, yes, to-morrow, don't worry," George shouted to the children.

"Mr. Martin's been awfully kind at keeping them amused," said Phyllis. "Mr. Martin, Mr. and Mrs. Brook, Miss Clyde.—George, turn on the light, Mr. Martin can't *see* us."

The button clicked, the bulbs jumped to attention, mere loops of pale wire beside the orange shaft of sun. Martin scrambled suddenly to his feet.

"How do you do," he said.

"What stunning towels," Ruth remarked as Phyllis was pointing out the hot-water tap. The embroidery of Phyllis's maiden initials was luxuriously illegible, in some sort of Old High German character. "Surely those didn't come with the house?"

"No; they're mine; all that's left of my trousseau. What George calls my pre-war towels."

But Ruth was too busy in her own thoughts to pursue little jokes.

"Your artist man is rather extraordinary," she said. "Why should any one so attractive need to be so bashful?"

"He's not really bashful.—There, I think you'll find everything you need."

The light twinkled on a tray of yellowish glasses on the sideboard. George unlocked the cupboard, took out a bottle, and split open a new box of cigarettes with his thumbnail. There's a consolation in having these small things to do, he thought. Meanwhile, what am I really thinking of? I suppose she's washing her hands. It's awkward having her downstairs. She'll want to change. . . . I don't believe she's got a mirror in there. We can hardly expect her to use the bookcase panes.

"Excuse me a moment," he said. "Ben, pour the tonic. It's good stuff." Mr. Martin was still standing by the door uncertainly, holding the toy engine. Heavens, does the fellow have to be moved round like a chess man? He's so difficult to talk to, somehow. George made a cordial

gesture, indicating that Mr. Martin might as well join Ben at the sideboard. Martin crossed the room obediently.

The anxious host glanced into the sitting room. Yes: Phyllis, with her usual skill, had turned the desk into a dressing table: there was a fresh doily on it, a vase of flowers, and the mirror from his own bureau upstairs. Already, though she hadn't entered it yet, the room was no longer his but Joyce's. It had become private, precious, and strange. Here, in the very centre of his own muddled affairs, was suddenly a kernel of unattainable magic. Why in God's name had Phyllis put her in his room? It was too savagely ironic. In my heart, in my mind, in my very bed, and I can't even speak to her. It's too farcical. If I didn't have to keep it secret we could all laugh about it. Secrecy is the only poison.

He carried in Joyce's suitcase and paint box, put them on the couch, and fled.

"Well, Ben, I saved my last bottle for this party. It'll help us live through the Picnic. Mr. Martin, aren't you drinking?"

"What is it?" asked Martin.

"Try it and see. You don't need to worry. It's real."

Ben held up his glass, prolonging anticipation.

The fine vatted aroma of the rye cheered his nostrils. Here at least was one trifle which helps assuage the immense tedium of life.

"Funny to see the old place again," he said. "How well I remember those coloured panes. Well . . ."

"Never drink without a sentiment," said George.

"All right: stained glass windows."

"Good enough. Stained glass windows."

"Is this your first visit?" Ben began politely; but the other guest was still coughing and gagging. His eyes were full of tears.

Not used to good stuff, George thought. You don't get much of this genuine rye nowadays. He and Ben waited, rather embarrassed, until the other had stopped patting his chest. Ben lit a cigarette and blew a ring.

Martin's face brightened. He put out his finger and hooked the floating twirl.

"That's lovely!" he said. "How do you do it?"

Ben was pleased at this tribute to his only social accomplishment.

"Why, it's quite easy. Get a big mouthful of smoke, purse your lips in a circle, like the hole in a doughnut, and raise your tongue suddenly to push the smoke out."

"Do it again."

Ben looked so comic, shaping his mouth, Martin couldn't help laughing.

"You look like a catfish. Can *you* do it too?"

"Not so well as Ben. Gosh, didn't you ever see any one blow smoke rings before?"

"No. My father doesn't smoke."

Ben looked a little perplexed. He had an uneasy feeling that perhaps the artist was making fun of them in some obscure way.

Phyllis called from the stairs. "George, will you come up and speak to the children? They want to be reassured about the Picnic."

"Do I have to finish this medicine?" Martin asked.

George grinned at him, rather tickled by this drollery.

"You must do as you think best. Make yourselves at home, you fellows. I'll be back in a minute."

"Don't you like it?" said Ben.

"No."

"Well, I can help you."

"It was nice of you to blow a smoke ring to amuse me."

There was silence, which Ben concluded by taking the other glass of whisky.

"Happy days," he said.

"To-morrow will be a happy day," Martin said.

"We're going to be reassured by a Picnic."

"Have a cigarette," was all that Ben could think of.

"Who were the ladies you brought with you?"

"Well, one of them's my wife."

"Which, the pretty one?"

Ben poured himself another slug. He felt he needed it. He had a strong desire to laugh, but there was sincere inquiry in Mr. Martin's eyes. He really wanted to know.

"Ask *them*," he said.

Phyllis came into the room.

"It'll soon be dinner time. You people all ready?"

Martin held out his arms. It was so nearly the substance of her dream, she moved forward to enter his embrace. Ben's face of surprise checked her in time. She took Martin's hands.

"Mr. Martin is my guest of honour," she explained lightly.

"He seems to be," said Ben, and finished his glass.

They stood a moment. Then Martin said, "You didn't look at them."

"At what?"

"My hands. I mean, are they clean enough?"

Janet and Sylvia were already in the two cots on the balcony; but their eyes were waiting for George, with that look of entreating expectancy worn by those who look upward from bed. In the lustrous garden air crickets were beginning to wheedle. The rickety old porch seemed an alcove of simpleness divided from the absurd tangled emotions of the house. But even here was passion: the little white trousered figures sprang up, their strenuous arms clutched him, their eyes were dark with anxiety. With horror he saw how they appealed to him as omnipotent all-arranging arbiter. Him, the poor futile bungler! They crushed him with the impossible burden of their faith.

“Yes, we’ll have the Picnic to-morrow. Now you go to sleep and get a good rest.”

“Mother forgot to hear our prayers.”

He stood impatient as they lengthily rehearsed, one after the other, their confident innocent petitions. The clear voices chirruped, but he shut their words from his mind, as regardless as God. Would they never finish? To hear these dear meaningless desiderations was too tender a torment. He tried to think of other things—of anything—of the sea; of washing his hands and putting on a clean collar; of the striped brown and

silver tie that he intended to wear to-morrow (Joyce had never seen it); and what on earth are we going to do to amuse these people after dinner?

“ . . . and Mother and Daddy and all friends kind and dear; and let to-morrow be a nice day for the Picnic . . . ”

Poor little devils, he thought; they seem as far away from me as if they were kittens or puppies. People pretend that children are just human beings of a smaller size, but I think they're something quite different. They live in a world with only three dimensions, a physical world immersed in the moment, a reasonable world, a world without that awful sorcery of a fourth measurement that makes us ill at ease. What is it their world lacks? Is it self-consciousness, is it beauty, is it sex? (Three names for the same thing, perhaps.) Little Sylvia with her full wet eyes, what torments of desire she would arouse some day in some deluded stripling.

Strange world of theirs: a world that has no awareness of good and evil; a world merely pretty, whereas ours is beautiful. A world that knows what it wants; whereas we are never quite sure. . . .

He looked at them with amazement. Where did they come from, how did they get there?

They were more genuine than himself, they would still be in this incredible life long after he had been shovelled out of it. How soon would they begin to see through the furious pettiness of parents? See that we do everything we punish them for attempting, that we torture them for our own weakness, set their teeth on edge for the taste of our own green grapes?

He tucked them in, gave each rounded hill of blanket a consoling pat, and left them. Joyce was standing in the passage. She had changed her clothes and was wearing a plain grey linen dress. He wanted to tell her that she was one of the unbelievably rare women who never have a pink strap of ribbon running loose across one shoulder. There must be *some* solution of that problem? A man would have abolished it long ago. But she's on her way to the bathroom, I suppose; it'll be more polite if I just stand aside and let her pass without saying anything. Besides, we can't talk here, right outside Ruth's door.

But she did not move. Evidently she had been watching his little scene with the children. In a flicker of the mind he wondered whether his part in it had looked creditable. He was afraid it had. For now, to her at any rate, he hankered to be known as the troubled imbecile he really was.

"And you wonder why I envy you," she said.

He didn't answer. He was busy reminding himself that that was what her eyes were like. It is only a few times that any man has the chance or the will to search the innermost bravery of other human faces. He had thought much about her eyes, had imagined the fine glory of telling them about themselves. Foreigners, he would call them; bright aliens not quite at home in the daily disasters of earth's commonplace. Foreigners, but he was on the pier waiting for them. They seemed to know that life is a precious thing and that we are always in danger of marring it. He imagined them as they would be if their shadow of questioning were skimmed away; if they were flooded with the light of complete surrender, of reckless trust. But how can these things be said? There is no code, he thought: so perhaps the wise presently abandon attempt to communicate. The gulf surrounds us all; only here and there on the horizon a reversed ensign shows where some stout spirit founders in silence. Or now and then, in the casual palaver of the day, slips out some fantastic phrase to show how man rises from clay to potter, can even applaud the nice malice of his own comedy.

He had got beyond the point where he could talk

to her in trivialities. He must say all or nothing.

"Lucky children," she said. "I wish *I* had someone to hear my prayers.—If I had, I might say some."

"I *didn't* hear them. I wasn't listening; I couldn't. Oh, Joyce, Joyce, there's so much I want to say, and your eyes keep interrupting me."

He thrilled a little at himself, and felt better. For he had his Moments: unforeseen felicities when he said the humorous and necessary word: and when his Moments came he could not help gloating over them. She gloated too, for she relished that innocent glee when he congratulated his own mind. When himself was his own guest of honour, and he stood genially at the front door.

So she smiled. What other woman could ever reward a lucky phrase with such magic of wistful applause?

"I apologize for them. They didn't mean to be rude."

She was so young and straight in her plain frock, so blessedly unconscious of herself. He thought of her fine strong body, the ungiven body that was so much her own, near him again after all the miracles of life that divide flesh from flesh and then bring it again within grasp; her sweet uncommanded beauty, irrelevant perhaps, yet so

thrillingly a symbol of her essence. The noble body, noor blasphemed perfection, worshipped in the dead husks of statue and painting and yet so feared in its reality. He had to remind himself that it *was* irrelevant. How could any man with a full quota of biology help dream of mastering that cool, unroused detachment?

Ah, he had already had all of her that was imperishable: her dreams, her thoughts, her poor secret honesties. She had given him these, and nothing could spoil them. He had agreed with himself that his love was merely for her mind. (Distressing thought!) It was only the ridiculous need of keeping this passion to themselves that darkened and inflamed it. If it could be announced it would instantly become the purest thing on earth. It would be robbed of its sting. He imagined an engraved card:—

*Mr. and Mrs. George Granville  
have the honour to announce  
the betrothal of Mr. Granville's mind  
to that of Miss Joyce Clyde  
Nothing Carnal*

*"Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediments."*

But this would satisfy no one. Perhaps not even themselves. And people don't like things to be pure: it casts a rebuke on their own secrets.

"Joyce, let's make our announcement at this party."

"What announcement?" She looked startled.

"Why, that our minds are engaged."

Her hand, in his, tightened a little, reproachfully.

"George, before you go down. Who is this Mr. Martin?"

"I don't really know; some friend of Phyl's. I never saw him before. She says he's going to do a portrait of her. I think he's kidding her."

He turned toward the stairs and then called her back.

"Listen," he said softly. "When I say something, after dinner, about putting the car away, that's your cue. Slip away and come with me. I want to show you something."

## XII

THE kitchen, that had been a core of fiery heat all day, was now more comfortable. Lizzie sat in an easy slouch, elbows on the oilcloth table cover, enjoying her own supper before attacking the great piles of dishes. The cleansed air, drifting through the open window, struck pleasantly on the moist glow of her body. There was a light tread on the back steps and the squeak of the screen door. The cook felt too deservedly slack to turn, but removed her mouth from the ear of corn just far enough to speak.

"Back early, ain't you?"

"Yeah. Brady's shofer was coming this way in their station wagon. Save me walking later on."

"Didn't expect you so soon, nice night like this."

"Well, Brady's bus was coming. Say, that fellow's got a nerve, all right."

Nounou tossed her hat on the shelf; ran her hands through her hair, sat down wearily in the other chair.

"Kids in bed?"

"Sure, before dinner. I'm glad you're back. You can give me a hand with the dishes."

"Where's all the folks?"

"On the porch."

Nounou got up, glanced cautiously through the pantry window, then took a cigarette from her bag and lit it. Lizzie, a native of Dark Harbour, reflected sombrely on the ways of metropolitan nursemaids.

"There's ice cream in the freezer if you want some."

"No, thanks. Brady's man blew me in the village. Gee, that boy's fresh."

Lizzie was a little annoyed at this repetition. It was a long time since any one had paid her the compliment of being fresh.

"It's the weather. Hot days and cool nights always makes trouble."

A brief silence. The kettle steamed softly on the range, Lizzie gnashed at her corn-cob, Nounou blew a gust of smoke and measured the stacks of dishes with a gloomy eye. Washing up was no part of her job, but she was somewhat in awe of the older woman; and the cook's dogged abstraction as she leaned over her food suggested that she had matter to impart.

"This place is certainly dead," Nounou grumbled. "Two miles to walk to the village, and a movie one night a week. Gosh, what a dump to spend summer in. Honest, Liz, I'm so tired workin', if I'd got that insurance o' mine paid up I'd quit a spell."

"Keeps you from thinkin', don't it? If I had your job I wouldn't kick. Wear white cloes and lay out in the sun with them kids."

"You'd ought to get a place in the city. A good cook like you are could make big money."

"It ain't so dead round here as you might think. Say, you know that man was in the garden 'smorning, the one the children took such a shine to. Is he an old friend to the family?"

"Who?—the one that asked for a piece of cake? Never saw him before. I thought he acted kinda crazy."

"Well, they got him stayin' in the house. He must be someone they know pretty well, he calls 'em all to their first names. Say, I wish you'd seen 'em at supper, honest it was a sketch."

"Who all is there?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Brook, just usual sort o' people; and a dame they call Miss Clyde, dark and a bit serious-lookin'; and this Mr. Martin. Well, for the lovamike, when I go in to fix the table I

see smoke coming out from behind that screen in the corner, I think something's afire. I run over and there's Mr. Martin setting on the floor smoking on a cigarette. He looks at me sort of frightened, then he laughs and says not to tell anybody because he's learnin' to make rings. He stands around talkin' to me while I'm laying the table, and then Mrs. G. comes in. He says to her 'Do I have to go to bed right after dinner?' The funny thing is he's got a cheerful kind of way about him, you don't much mind what he does, he does it so natural. Of course she knowed he was jokin', she says he can set up as late as he likes. He says it's nice to be able to do whatever you want to and he asks me if we're going to have anything good for supper. Then he asks if he can ring the gong. I always like to do that, he says. Mrs. G. and me both busts out laughing. We laughed and laughed like a couple of fools. I was trying to remember what we was laughing at. I don' know, we just screeched. He smiles too, kinda surprised. There's something about him puts me in mind of the way I used to find things comical when I was a kid. I remember one day I got sent home from school for laughing. It just struck me funny to see the harbour out there and the

sunlight on the water and people going up and down the street talkin'."

Nounou tried to imagine what Lizzie looked like as a young girl, convulsed with mirth.

"They all comes in to eat. By and by, while I'm serving the consommay, he leans over and whispers to her—he's settin' at her right. No one else can hear, but I got it, I was right in back of 'em. When I'm in bed, he says, will you come and tuck me in? Well, I wish you could seen her, as red and rosy; she looks swell to-night anyhow in that silver layout o' hers. I never seen any one look prettier; I think that other dame, Mrs. Brook, was kinda sore at Mrs. G. for wearin' it."

Nounou put down her cigarette in amazement.

"You must've got them wrong," she said. "These ain't that kinda folks, you're crazy."

"You never know what kinda people people is till you live in the house with 'em. 'Course it don't mean nothing to me what-all stuff they pull. But listen what I'm telling you. This Mr. Martin is quiet, he don't talk an awful lot, but every once and a while he comes through with something that knocks 'em cold. Going to bed seems to be on his mind. Next thing he says, right out loud, 'It's nice being in bed, it gives you a chance to be alone.'

“I couldn’t hear so much, bein’ in an’ out o’ the room; an’ the whole thing was on my shoulders anyways, because honest to God Mrs. G. was in some kind of a swoond. I declare she didn’t seem to know what-all was coming off. What with that Mr. Martin talking to me I forgot to put any bread at the places, and will you believe it she never took notice on it until Mrs. Brook piped up for some. When I pass Mrs. G. the peas she takes a ladlefull and holds it over her plate so long I didn’t know what to do. Oh, of course, they all talk along smart and chirpy, the way folks does at a dinner party, pretend to kid each other an’ all, but I can see it don’t mean nothing. Mrs. Brook has some line she thinks a lot of, she springs it on Miss Clyde, I reckon you’re wedded to your art she says, throwing it at her pretty vicious. It was bad for Mrs. Brook, I’ll admit, setting between Mr. Martin and Mr. G. Because Mr. G. don’t make up to her none, he’s talking to the Clyde girl all the time; and Mr. Martin don’t buzz her none neither. She sings out how much she does love children and Mr. Martin says But do they love you? A good piece of the time she has to talk to her husband, across the table, and you know that makes any woman sore at a party. Once and a while Mrs. G. comes to life

and says something about what a good time we'll have to the Picnic; this Martin says Yes, he hankers to see Mr. Granville climb a tree. Mr. G. wants to know what he'll be climbing trees for. 'Why,' says Mr. Martin, 'I heard her say you'd be up a tree if that check didn't come in to-day.' Then Mr. Martin says he likes the way Mr. G. and Miss Clyde looks at each other, as though they had secrets together. He's got an attractive way to him, but it seems like he says whatever comes into his head. What-all way is that to behave?"

Lizzie had looked forward to telling Nounou about the dinner. Now she felt with a keen disappointment that it was impossible to describe it adequately. Besides, what she had intended to say would perhaps sound too silly. Mr. Martin looks like some old lover of Mrs. G's, she thought, that's turned up unexpected. He's kinda forgotten about her, put her outa his life. But she's mad about him, all her heart's old passion is revived. Better not say too much about these things to Nounou anyhow; she might let Brady's man go too far.

"Come on, kid," she said, getting up from the table. "Give me a hand with this stuff. I gotta get this kitchen clean, the madam will be coming

in here afterwhile to cut sandwiches. We get this finished, we can hit the hay."

Nounou smiled a little as she took the dish-towel.

"I'll help you clean up," she said. "Then I'm going to slip out a while longer."

### XIII

NOW it was dusk: dusk that takes away the sins of the world. Under that soft cone of shadow, wagged like a dunce cap among the stars, are folly and glamour and despair; but no sin. The day was going back to the pure darkness where all things began; to the nothing from which it had come; to the unconsciousness that had surrounded it. The long, long day had orbed itself to a whole. Its plot and scheme were perfect; its crises and suspenses artfully ordered; now darkness framed it and memory gave it grace. Tented over by upward and downward light, mocked by tinsel colours and impossible desires, another cunning microcosm was complete.

"I like your orchestra," said Joyce. They were all sitting on the veranda steps. From the garden and the dunes beyond came the rattling tremolo of summer insect choirs.

No one spoke for a moment. Phyllis was enjoying a relaxation after the effort of the dinner table. It was no longer necessary to think, every instant, of something to say. Darkness takes the

place of conversation. It replies to everything. Like fluid privacy the shadow rose and flowed restfully about them; faces were exempt from scrutiny; eyes, those timid escapers from question, could look abroad at ease. Reprieved from angers and anxieties, the mind yearned to come home under the roof of its little safe identity. It had not forgotten the distractions that make life hard: quarrels, the income tax, unanswered letters, toothache: but these hung for a moment, merely a pretty sparkle of fireflies. I feel as though I were really Me, Phyllis thought. I wish there were someone to hold my hand.

I wonder if I *do* like it? Joyce thought as soon as she heard her own voice.

Come home, come home to yourself, cried the incessant voice of darkness. The soulless musicians of earth fiddled with horrid ironic gusto. Nothing is true but desire, they wailed and wheedled. Now they were fierce piccolo and pibroch; now they had the itinerant rhythm of bawdy limericks.

Special intensity of silence seemed to emanate from Ben and Ruth, who sat close together on the top step. In the general pause theirs was like a hard core: it was not true silence but only repressed speech. The smell of Ben's cigar floated

among the group like an argument. It had a sensible, civilized, matter-of-fact, downtown fragrance. It seemed to suggest that someone—even the crickets, perhaps—should put down a proposition in black and white. Joyce had a feeling that Ben and Ruth were waiting for any one to say anything; and that when it was said they would jointly subject it to careful businesslike scrutiny. Contents noted, and in reply would say——

“Orchestra?” repeated Ben, in a puzzled voice.

“The crickets.” (She tried not to make it sound like an explanation.) “I’d forgotten that nights on the Island were like this.”

Martin was sitting just below her. He had been playing with the pebbles on the path, picking them up and dropping them. He turned and looked up at her.

“Like what?” he asked.

She had the same sensation of disbelief she had felt at the dinner table. One must be strangely innocent or strangely reckless to ask questions like that. George’s face shone in the flare of a match: he looked empty solemn and pensive as men always do while lighting a pipe. Joyce felt almost as though there were a kind of conspiracy against her to make her take the lead in talking.

“They fiddle away as though it was the most

important night that ever happened," she said, a little nervously. "As though they think it's a First Night and the reviewers are here from the newspapers."

"It *is* the most important night that ever happened," said Phyllis slowly. "It's *now*." There was a queer frightened tremble in her voice.

"There'll be a moon a little later," said George. He said it rather as though this would be creditable to him, as host.

"No, George, don't let there be a moon. Not everything at once, it's too much."

Something in George's outline showed that he thought Phyllis was merely chaffing him; but Joyce was more clairvoyant. For the first time she became aware of some reality in Phyllis: saw that she was more than just George's wife. There was in her some buried treasure that no one had ever taken the trouble to hunt for. Why, she's lovely, Joyce thought. In a sudden impulse she wanted to take Phyllis's hand; her own fluttered liftingly in her lap; she restrained it, for she felt that she would want to kiss George before very long and it didn't seem quite square to be in love with a man and his wife simultaneously. It would be extravagant, she supposed sadly.

"We don't need a moon," she said, "with Mrs. Granville wearing that lovely silver dress."

"It makes me feel as though we ought to do something special," said Martin.

"We can have a game of Truth," suggested George.

No one showed much enthusiasm except Martin, who wanted to know how it was played.

"Everyone must tell some thought he has had but didn't say."

Ben and Ruth felt more certain than ever that the evening was going to be a failure.

"A thought you've had *ever*?" asked Martin.

"No, this evening."

"You suggested it, George; you can go first," said Ruth.

"Ruth evidently believes that unspoken thoughts are always terrible."

"They can't be much more terrible than some of the things that were said at dinner," Ruth retorted.

"In this game you don't get to the really interesting stuff until after several rounds, when people get warmed up. I'll begin with a very small one. I was thinking that I mustn't forget to put away the car.—Now Ruth, what's yours?"

"That Miss Clyde probably has a very becoming bathing suit."

"I was thinking I heard one of the children calling," said Phyllis. "But it wasn't, it was only a singing in my nose."

"What a funny nose," said Martin.

"Don't you know how something seems to get caught in your nostril and makes a kind of singing when you breathe?"

Ben had had time to make a careful choice of the least damning of his meditations. "I was thinking that the crickets don't really sound like an orchestra. They're more like adding machines."

"Why, that's true," George exclaimed. "They have just that even, monotonous, cranking sound. Adding up some impossible and monstrous total. Counting the stars, maybe."

"I hope you won't think my thought is rude," said Joyce. "It struck me that if it weren't for Mr. Brook's cigar I'd be convinced this is all a dream.—I don't mean it isn't a nice cigar, just that it smells so worldly."

"Well, our secret thoughts all seem fairly innocent. But we haven't heard yours yet, Mr. Martin."

"I don't think this is a very interesting game," said Martin.

George insisted. "Come, the guest of honour can't escape as easily as that. Out with it!"

"Do I have to?" Martin appealed to Phyllis. She came out of her reverie, aware that even darkness is inadequate as a sedative. The threads of relationship among them all had tightened.

"I know what Mr. Martin's trouble is," said Ruth. "He says everything he thinks, so naturally he has nothing left."

"Why, that's just it," Martin said. "How did you know? What would be the good of thinking things and not saying them?"

"You're not playing fair," George objected. "No one would be crazy enough to say everything. Besides, there wouldn't be time."

Martin was stubbornly silent.

"I agree with Mr. Martin," Phyllis said. "It's not a very cheerful game. If we didn't say our thoughts we must have had some good reason for keeping them silent. Besides, I must speak to Lizzie about breakfast."

"I'll take the car to the stable."

"Can I go with you?" Martin asked.

George had still cherished a forlorn hope that the world was large enough for him and Joyce to have a few moments alone. For several days the stable had been sanctified in his anticipation.

In the hayloft above the old disused stalls there was a big doorway that opened toward the sea. That mustily fragrant place was his favourite retreat when solitude seemed urgent. There, he had thought, he and Joyce could talk. He had even put an old steamer rug on the hay so they might sit more comfortably. There would be moonlight over the water. . . .

"Is it the same stable where we used to play as kids?" cried Ruth. "Oh, let's all go. I want to see it again. Why, that old haymow was the first place Ben ever kissed me."

"What did he do that for?" said Martin.

"Perhaps he'll do it again," said George bitterly. It was just like Ruth to ruin the stable for him.

"Well, I don't want to spoil any one else's plans," said Ben.

"We could play hide-and-seek in the hay," Martin suggested.

Now they were all piling into the car, to ride round the house to the stable. This was of a piece with the absurdity of everything else, George thought. People were always driving up in crowds to visit his secrets. Like sight-seeing busses loaded with excursionists. The world loves to trample over your private ecstasies and leave them littered

with scraps of paper and banana peel. And this fellow Martin, with his cool mockery, was beginning to get on his nerves.

The engine leapt into life with the same eager alacrity as if they had been starting off for a long drive. Yes, the human objective means nothing to the routine of Nature. She looses her lightning indifferently, whether between the sooty termini of a spark plug or from charged cloud to earth. She squanders as much energy in a meadow of hallooing crickets as in a human spirit tormented by conflicting passions.

They made the circuit of the house. Down the drive from the front door to the main road, along the side of the house, then up the back lane by the kitchen and the circular bed of cannas. Only a hundred yards, but it seemed interminable because it was futile and meaningless. Something had gone wrong in his time sense. As the car passed the kitchen window he could see Phyllis talking to Lizzie, holding up a loaf of bread as she spoke. At the same moment Ruth was saying something about the moon coming up. His mind went off in a long curve. He felt a gush of anger at Phyllis because she had been so unaware of his feeling for Joyce. If she had been spiteful, or jealous, or suspicious, how much easier it would

have been. Her pettiness would have driven him and Joyce blissfully into each other's arms, without the faintest sense of remorse. But this strangely detached Phyllis who seemed to move in a dream, instead of the familiar Phyllis of tempers and reproaches, was a different problem. Even sin, he thought furiously, is to be made as difficult as possible for me. And I had always imagined it would be so easy. Will God ever forgive me if I don't commit the sins I was intended to? God will get no praise from me, He's packed the house with a claque of crickets to put the show over. Through the window Phyllis's golden head shone in a haze of lamplight. As always, when angry at her he loved her most. When you love a woman, why make her life miserable by marrying her? Marriage demands too much. . . .

From this speculation he came back to find Ruth just finishing her sentence, the car still opposite the window, the loaf of bread still lifted in Phyllis's hand. It occurred to him that this evening was damnably like the slowed motion-pictures in which the stream of life is retarded into its component gestures. Now he was to have the embarrassment of witnessing the actual rhythm of living, the sluggish pattern that underlies gay

human ritual, the grave airy dancing of creation treading softly its dark measure to unheard, undreamed music. The smallest alteration in the mind's pace changes everything, as some trifling misprint turns a commonplace newspaper headline into obscenity.

They drove into the stable.

"I miss the nice old horsey smell," said Ruth. "Too bad, it's only a garage now."

"Which was it you wanted to revive, the horsey smell or the embraces of Ben?" said George. "The loft hasn't changed much, I think."

He snapped on the light. While the others climbed the narrow little stair behind the old feed bins he filled the radiator with water and poured oil into the crank case. Morosely he heard their words overhead.

"Someone's left a blanket up here."

"Look, the bay's all full of moonlight. I didn't remember it was like that."

"We were children then, we didn't know about the moon. We had to go to bed too early."

"The old swing's gone." (This was Mr. Martin's voice.)

"Why . . . how did you know? Yes, that's where it was, that beam. . . ."

I thought that lunatic had been here before,

George said to himself. He seems to know his way about.

He started the motor again. He thought he had noticed a faint roughness in its turning. He listened attentively, marvelling at the strong, hurrying fidelity of those airy explosions. I know why this car has kept her youth, he thought. She hasn't had any proper care, but she's been loved. A soft throbbly purring, with a sweet quavering rhythm; the sound of sliding, of revolving, of vapour evenly expelled. It was a consoling, normal kind of sound; complete in itself; it shut out the voices upstairs. A touch on the throttle and it rose to a growl of unused power, a shout of fierce unquestioning assent, not much different from defiance. The old barn rang. It was as if an officer of some colonial regiment called on his legions for a fatal exploit, and heard in their answering yell a voice of savagery that might turn against himself.

He switched the key; the sound slid off into a soft conclusive sigh. There was an almost human breath of frustration in it. He closed the hood, his mind too vague for thinking, and saw Joyce standing there.

"I thought Mr. and Mrs. Brook would like a moment of privacy," she whispered.

He had her in his arms. On her soft lips was all the bittersweet of their long separation, of their mirth together, of their absurd and precious passion, denied by men and ratified by crickets. It was the perfect embrace of those who are no longer children, who can sweeten the impossible by mocking it a little. The tingling triumph of social farce, undreamed by poor candid Nature—the first illicit kiss!

“I suppose,” she said tremulously, “that this really is what they call a Guilty Passion.”

“My dear, my dear. What a queer world, where one has to apologize for loving people.”

As though down a long avenue of distance he saw her in the perspective of her life: an exquisite gallant figure going about her brave concerns: so small and resolute in her single struggle with the world, and coming to his arms at last. He knew then that poets have not lied; that fairy tales are true; that life is hunger, and for every emptiness caters its own just food. Her mind that he had loved was tangled up with a body. Chastity was probably a much overrated virtue. For her sake, if she desired it, he was willing to make the heroic effort which is necessary to yield to temptation.

He held her close, in silence. Austere resolu-

tions slipped away like sand in an hour glass. For an instant his only thought was a silly satisfaction that she must reach so far upward to meet his lips. His mind taunted him for thinking this.

"Dear fool, dear damned fool," he said. "Yes, you're just as you should be: lips cool and eyelids warm. And as soft as I always imagined. Oh, it's not fair that any one should be so soft. Joyce, do you know why I had to have you here? It's just a year . . . you remember?"

"Yes. The day you were looking out of the window. How long it seems."

"We begin to feel like a nice old unmarried couple."

She laughed, her rare broken laugh.

"Oh, George, then it *is* really you. The Fourth you, I mean. I couldn't quite believe it."

Voices came down from the loft. First it was Martin:

. . . "That's what I like about her. She looks as if she's happy inside."

Then Ruth, with a scornful snicker:

"Happy? I dare say. Did you see the way she looked at George at the dinner table? That kind of woman's always happy with someone else's husband."

There was an inaudible murmur, then Ben's voice:

"It's a form of nervousness."

Joyce drew back from his arms. Her eyes were dark with horror.

"Oh . . ." she said with a sob. "Why are people so . . . so *inadequate*."

Ruth's little sneer, falling on them like a crystal spirt of poison, burned George's bare heart.

"Joyce, dear Joyce . . ." He put his hands on her shoulders. "I must tell you, I must. I've waited so long. Oh, it's so long since I've done anything I want to, I've forgotten how. Joyce, you don't know how I needed you. I was hungry, I was a beggar, you fed me with laughter and taught me how to suffer. You taught me how to love, yes, everything I love I love a thousand times better because I know you. God help me, I love even Phyllis better because of you. . . ."

With a gesture of pathos and despair she buried her face in his coat. They heard the others beginning to descend. To postpone for a few moments the necessity of speech, he turned wildly to the car and again started the engine. As Ruth appeared at the foot of the stairs, her mouth opening to say something, he speeded the motor to a roar.

"Oh, George," piped Ruth as they were walking back to the house. "I've left my scarf. I must have dropped it in the loft. Ben'll get it. Have you locked the barn?"

"No, we don't lock anything around here."

"You laugh at locksmiths," said Joyce.

"I'll go," George said. "I can find it easier than Ben. There's a flashlight in the car."

He walked back to the stable. Alemonade-coloured moon was swimming above the maple tree. He did not bother to get the torch but slipped up the stair, moving noiselessly on rubber soles. The scarf was lying just at the top, where the steps emerged into the old harness room. He was about to glance into the hayloft, to satisfy his sentimental vision of how it would have looked to him and Joyce, a cavern of country fragrance, a musk of dead summers still banked there in pourried mounds. He was halted, with a catch of breath, by murmuring voices. He peered round the doorpost. A slope of powdery moonlight carved a pale alley through the heavy shadow. On his rug, spread toward the open window, sat Nounou and Brady's man, ardently enlaced.

The whispering pair, engrossed in rudimentary endearment, were oblivious of all else. It amused

him to reflect that they must have been hiding anxiously somewhere in the loft while the visitors palavered near them. A single cricket, embalmed in the hay, chirped sweet airy prosits—solitary lutanist (or prothalamist) of the occasion. George stood smitten by the vulgar irony. There was cruel farce and distemper in finding his own dear torment parodied in these terms of yokel dalliance. The parable was only too plain. This back-yard amour was as rich in Nature's eyes as the kingliest smoke-room story of the Old Testament. Nature, genial procuress, who impartially honours the breach and the observance.

With the crude humour of the small boy, never quite buried in any man, he emitted a loud groaning wail of mimic anguish. He thrilled with malicious mirth to see the horrified swains leap up in panic. He tiptoed stealthily away, leaving them aghast.

This has got to end, he said to himself.

#### XIV

**I**F THERE were only one moonshiny night in each century, men would never be done talking of it. Old lying books would be consulted; in padded club chairs grizzled gentry whose grandfathers had witnessed it would prate of that milky pervasion that once diluted the unmixed absolute of night. And those who had no vested gossip in the matter would proclaim it unlikely to recur, or impossible to have happened.

Mr. and Mrs. Brook and Martin had gone on toward the veranda. Joyce lingered where the edge of the house's shadow was a black frontic on the grass. The lawn was a lake of pallor. Under the aquamarine sky, glazed like the curly inmost of a shell, earth was not white or glittering, but a soft wash of argentine grey. There was light enough to see how invisible the world truly is. The pure unpurposeful glamour poured like dissolving spirit on the dull fogged obscure of ordinary evening: the cheap veneers of shadow peeled away, true darkness was perceivable: the dark that threads like marrow in the bones of

things: the dark in which light is only an accidental tremble. Where trees and shrubs glowed in foamy tissue, hung chinks and tinctures of appeasing nothing. This was abyss unqualified, darkness neat.

She was drowned at the bottom of this ocean of transparency. She felt as people look under water, pressed out of shape, refracted, blurred by the pressure of an enormous depth of love. In such clean light a thought, a memory, a desire, could put on shape and living, stare down the cautious masks of habit. The trustiest senses could play traitor inside this bubble of pearly lustre; the hottest bonfires of mirth would be only a flicker in this dim stainless peace. Better to go indoors, join the polite vaudeville of evasion, escape the unbearable reality of this enchanted . . .

"Here you are!" said a voice. "Thank goodness. I want to ask you things. You're different."

It was Martin.

"What's the matter with all these people?" he exclaimed. "Why can't they have fun? Why do they keep on telling me they love me? I don't want to be loved. You can't be happy when you're being loved all the time. It's a nuisance.

I want to build castles in the sand and play croquet and draw pictures. I want to go to bed and get a good sleep for the Picnic; and that lady wants me to kiss her. I did it once; isn't that enough?"

Here was a merriment: to expect her, at this particular junction of here and now, to join his deprecations.

"Quite enough," she said. "But it depends on the person. She may not think so."

"It's Mrs. Phyllis. I asked her if she was ready for me to go to bed, and she said I mustn't say such things. What's the matter with her? I think she's angry. Everybody seems angry. Why is it?"

Her pulses were applauding her private thought: If Phyllis loves *him*, I can love George.

"And I saw Bunny in the garden. She says you're the only one who can help me because you almost understand."

"Bunny! Bunny who? What do you mean? . . ."

He must be mad. Yet it seemed an intelligible kind of madness: some unrecognized but urgent meaning sang inside it like a sweet old tune. In the misty moonlight she saw the great wheel of Time spinning so fast that its dazzling spokes

seemed to shift and rotate backward. But her mind still intoned its own jubilee: If Phyllis loves *him*, I can love George. It's all right for me to love George. Be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors!

"Bunny Richmond, of course. She's playing some kind of hide-and-seek round here. It's not fair."

"It *is* fair!" cried Bunny passionately. He could hear her calling to him from somewhere just round the corner of the path. "Oh, Martin, Martin, can't you see? I can't *tell* you, you've got to find out for yourself."

Bunny had cried out so eagerly that even Joyce almost heard her. She turned to look.

"What was that, someone whispering?"

"It's only Bunny," he said impatiently. "She's playing tricks on me. She wants me to go away."

Joyce had stepped out of the shadow, and now Martin partly saw.

"Why, I know who you are. Why . . . why, of course. They called you Miss Clyde, that fooled me. You're not Miss Anybody, you're Joyce . . . the one who gave me the mouse. *You* don't love me too, do you? People only love you when they want you to do things."

Bunny kept calling him, but he closed his ears to her.

"No, I don't love you," she said slowly. "I love George."

But she had to look at him again to be sure. He was very beautiful and perplexed. Perhaps she loved everybody. For an instant she thought he *was* George; she could see now that there was a faint resemblance between them. Then she noticed that George was there too. He had come along the path from the stable. His face was sharpened with resolve. He paid no attention to Martin, but spoke directly to her.

"Here's your scarf," he said, almost roughly, holding it out. Then he remembered it was not hers, and thrust it in his pocket. He made an uncertain step toward her.

"Oh, we can't go on like this," he said harshly. "This has got to . . ." He made a queer awkward gesture with his arms. She went to them.

"How funny you are," observed Martin from the shadow. "First you want to push her away and then you hug her."

Apparently George did not hear him.

"Why did you wake me?" he was asking her.

"Why couldn't I go on sleepwalking through life? If I had never known you, how much anguish I'd have missed. Oh, my poor dear."

"You mustn't talk to her like that," said Martin. "This is Joyce, she thinks once is enough. She isn't like Phyllis."

"Go away, Martin," called Bunny. "It's no use now."

George held her fiercely. His voice trembled on broken words of tenderness. His bewildered mind craved the ease of words, a little peace, a little resting time. Must this glory of desire be carried for ever secret in his heart?

"You'll hurt her," said Martin angrily.

This they had stumbled on, George's heart cried to him. It was none of their seeking. She belongs to who can understand her, insisted the sweet sophistries of blood. Joyce leaned up to him, the dear backward curve of woman yearning to the face of her dream.

"Don't you know me?" Martin appealed to her. "You gave me the mouse yesterday."

He was unheeded. They did not even know he was there.

"You're doing it too," he said to her bitterly, and went away.

"George, when did I give you a mouse?"

"A mouse? What are you talking about? You're going to give me something much better than a mouse. Do you know what I said to you once in a dream? I said, the worst of my love for you is that it's so carnal."

Her eyes met his, troubled but steady.

"And do you know what you answered?"

"No," she said pitifully. "Oh, George, George, I don't know about these things."

"You said, 'Perhaps that's what I like about it.'"

She clung to him in a kind of terror.

"I don't know whether I said that. George . . . don't let's be like other people. Does it *matter*?"

They stood together and the crickets shouted, rattled tiny feet of approval on the floor of the dunes like a gallery of young Shelleys. The whole night was one immense rhythm; up the gully from the beach came a slow vibration of surf. She was weak with the question in her blood, her knees felt empty. Perhaps that's where your morality is kept, in the knees, she thought. She slipped her arms under his coat, round the hard strong case of his ribs, to keep from tottering. The tobacco smell of his lapel was infinitely precious and pathetic.

"How do I know what matters?" he whispered. "We can wait and see. If it's important, the time will come. But I want you to know, my love for you is complete. It wants everything. Can't you hear the whole world singing it? Everything, everything, everything."

"I don't like the crickets. They're trying to get us into trouble."

Everything is so queer this evening, she thought. How did all this happen? I'm frightened.

"We've always been different from other people," she said. "We're absurd and pitiful and impossible. Don't let's spoil it, let's just be *us*."

His arms held her more gently. For love is beyond mere desire: it is utter tenderness and pity. Sing, world, sing: here are your children caught in the chorus of that old, old music; here are Food and Hunger that meet only to cancel and expire. Here, cries Nature in her deepest diapason, here are my bread and wine. Too great to be accused of blasphemy, she shames not to borrow the words of man's noblest fancy. Take, eat, she cries to the famished. This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. And her children, conscious of lowly birth, can rise to denials her old easy breast never dreamed.

"George," said Joyce quickly, "is any one watching . . . listening to us? I've had the strangest feeling. As though someone was trying to tell me something, calling me."

"A singing in your nose, perhaps."

"No, but really."

"I've been trying to tell you something."

"Where did Mr. Martin go? Wasn't he there?"

"I didn't see him."

They turned toward the house. Its dark shadow hung over them, clear, impalpable, black as charcoal. They felt purified by mutual confession and charity.

"I think it was the house listening to us," she said. "Why am I so happy?"

He knew that he loved her. It was not lust, for though he desired her and a thousand times had had her in his heart, yet he shrank from possession, fearing it might satiate this passion that was so dear. So it was a fool's love: perhaps a coward's, since to be taken is every woman's need. But who shall say? Life is a foreign language: all men mispronounce it.

He loved her, for he saw the spirit of life in her. He loved her as a dream, as something he himself had created, as someone who had helped to create part of him. He loved her because it was secret,

hopeless, impossible. He had loved her because he could not have her: and now she was here for his arms. The Dipper and the wind in the pine trees said, Poor fool, if you want her, take her. The black flap in the sky, where the starry pinning has fallen out (it opens into the law of gravity) said, It concerns only yourselves, no one will know. The tide and the whistling sand dunes said, She's yours already.

From the sleeping porch over their heads he heard one of the children cough.

"George," she whispered, "I'll do whatever you tell me."

He turned to her. "I'd like to see *any one* laugh at locksmiths."

## XV

THEY were entrenched in a little fortress of light. The tall silk-shaded lamp made the living hall an orange glow, an argument against silver chaos veined with brute nothing. The clock, the clock, the clock, measured itself against the infidel crickets. Phyllis, in a corner of the big sofa, was in the centre of that protecting glitter. She was panoplied in light: it poured upon the curve of her nape, sparkled in the bronze crisp of her hair, brimmed over the soft bend of her neck and ran deep down into the valley of her bosom. It rippled in scarps and crumples of her shining dress, struck in through the gauzy chiffon, lay in flakes on the underskirt, gilded the long slope of her stockings like the colour of dawn on snow. She could feel it, warm and defiant, wrapping her close, holding her together. Even her bright body, in such fragile garb, was hardly dark.

But the reality was still that pale emptiness outside. Where she sat she could see, beyond the dining room and the high rectangle of French windows, a pure shimmer of white night. Down

the broad open well of the stair the same tender void came drifting, floating, sinking. Summer night cannot be shut out: it is heavier than thin lamp-shine, it spreads along the floor, gathers beneath chairs, crowds up behind pictures, makes treacherous friendship with the gallant little red-headed bulbs.

She felt soft and ill. She felt her pliant body settling deeper into the thick cushion, her hands weighing inert upon her lap. She wished Ben and Ruth could be restful for a moment. Ruth was flitting about, looking at the furniture; Ben, though sitting quietly, kept blowing cigar smoke in a kind of rhythmical indignation. She could see his mind toiling, so plainly that she would not have been surprised to read words written in his spouts of smoke, as in the balloon issuing from the mouth of a comic drawing. If Mr. Martin would only say something. He had just come in from the garden, without a word, and sat expectantly at the foot of the stairs. He was outside the circle of light, she could not see him clearly, but he seemed to be looking at her with inquiry or reproach. For being such a dull hostess, probably.

But speech was impossible. Now, with eyes widened by terror and yearning, she was almost aware of the sleepy world that lies beneath the

mind's restless flit: the slow cruel world, without conscience, that the artist never quite forgets. In the glare of the lamp the room burned with subordinate life: the grainy wood of the furniture, the nap of the rug, the weave of the sofa, were fibred with obstinate essence. Being was in them as in her, went on and on. It seemed as though one sudden push, if it could be made, might break through the fog of daily bickerings and foresights and adjustments, into that radiant untroubled calm. But conscious life tends to take the level of the lowest present: with Ruth and Ben and even the house itself steadfast against her, how could she speak out? The darkness that, outdoors, had been sweet privacy, was here obverted into secrecy: secrecy lay under the chairs, behind the doors, between the ticks of the clock. She had settled this room, only a few hours before, with so much care—dusting, arranging; everything in its accustomed pose. Now it was too strong for her, and every pattern in it ran with shouts of taunting laughter. . . . It was just like George to linger in the garden, leaving her alone to “entertain” these guests.

Then she was aware that someone had spoken. She had not caught the words, but the sound poised in her mind. It was a pleasant sound, it

must have been Mr. Martin. Perhaps she would go through all the rest of her life without knowing what he had said. Yet it might have been a cry for help. You never know, she thought, when people may leave off pretending and lay their heads on your breast. What a silly way to put it: lay their head—his head—on your breasts; because you have only one head and two breasts. Perhaps that's why the insects make such an uproar, shrilling sour grapes. They're jealous because they're not mammals. . . .

"He went back to the stable to get my scarf."

"I hope they won't catch cold," said Phyllis. "It's so much cooler to-night."

"You oughtn't to kiss people when you have a cold," said Martin.

This, Phyllis supposed, was a little reckless aside for her alone. She felt a bright seed of anger in her; it was sprouting, climbing up the trellis of her nerves. She had a fine fertility for anger; her mind was shallow soil as its bottom had never been spaded: such seeds could not root deeply and slowly, so they shot upward in brilliant quick-withering flower. The rising warmth medicined her empty sickness. He was cruel, but she loved him for it and could have prostrated herself at his feet. What right had he to be so untouched, so

happy and certain and sure? His mind was one, not broken up into competing yearnings.

"Competition is the life of trade," she said.

Looking up, she wondered if she had said something accidentally witty. From the other side of the room Ruth was regarding her strangely. Beyond Ruth, black against the blanchèd evening, were George and Joyce on the veranda steps. . . . Oh, so that was what Martin had meant?

Ben's face was so perplexed and bored, she took pity on him.

"What would you people like to do? Play cards? We can't dance, there isn't any music."

Ruth was quite content not to dance; she suspected she would have had to take Ben as a partner. "Ben's favourite game is Twenty Questions," she said.

"Gracious, I haven't played that in ages. It'll be rather fun. Here come the others, let's do it."

George seemed almost like a stranger, Phyllis thought. She had an impish desire to ask to be introduced. It amused her to think that any one should want to kiss him.

"What a gorgeous night." He spoke loudly, rather as if someone might contradict. "Here's your scarf," he added, almost roughly, holding it

out to Joyce. Then he remembered, and gave it to Ruth.

"How funny you are," said Martin. "You made the same mistake again."

"Thank you so much," Ruth said. "I'm sorry you had such a long hunt for it."

Joyce crossed the room in silence. Ruth's eyes followed her, and it was in Ruth's face that Phyllis first saw Joyce was beautiful. She brought some of the moonlight with her. No man can ever admire a woman's loveliness as justly as another woman, for he rarely understands how her fluctuating charm depends on the hazard of the instant. Something had happened to make Joyce beautiful, and Phyllis was surprised by an immense compassion. This creature too was lonely, had her bewildered tumult in the blood, was defenceless and doomed. Ruth's watchful eyes, unseen by Joyce, were asking her whether she had anything to say for herself, anything that could be used against her. And Ruth (Phyllis could see) was as outraged by Joyce mute as she would have been at anything she said.

Joyce was helpless: helpless, because she was happy; helpless, for she had brought no words with her. She had brought only moonlight and it was

declared contraband. In the instant that the girl hesitated in the choice of a seat, Phyllis knew that she could have loved her, they could have come together in a miracle of understanding, but Ruth had made it impossible. Ruth, the comely fidget, who would never know the stroke of any grievance greater than her own jealous mischiefs. What could Ruth know of the great purifying passions, who had always forestalled them by yielding to the pettiest? The seedling anger in Phyllis's heart, sensitively questing an object, swayed outward as a young vine leans toward sun. She would not think of the Brooks again as Ben and Ruth. They were Ruth and Ben. She knew now why Ben peeped so warily from behind a rampart of sedentary filing cabinets. His soul lurked behind the greatest of hiding places, a huge office building.

With a swift impulse she reached out, beckoning to a place beside her on the sofa. Joyce's hand was cold and seemed surprised. The two hands, like casual acquaintances meeting by accident, lingered together wondering how to escape politely. Phyllis realized it was not a success. She leaned forward to speak brightly to George, so that her fingers might seem to slip free unawares.

"We're going to play Twenty Questions."

"Fine!" said George. This, he thought, would

prevent general conversation, the one thing most to be feared.

"Ben, you go out," Phyllis suggested. Ben deserved some amusement, he had been rather patient in the middle of this silent turmoil.

"Let Ruth," said Ben. "She's clever at guessing things."

"No, Ben, you," Ruth said definitely. She was having too good a time guessing as she was.

From the sofa Joyce could see into the little dark sitting room—*her* room: her only retreat. It drew her strongly. The frame of the window opened into moonlight and a queer twist of shadows. If only she could go in there, get away. Here, under the lamp, everything was too full of dangerous artifice. The light held everything together tightly, in a bursting tension. No one could say anything for fear it would have a double meaning. One meaning at a time was burden enough.

Was there anything queer about that little room? Mr. Martin, sitting at the bottom of the stairs, was close to the door: he was looking there too. In the back of her mind she remembered that she had started to say something to him in the garden; or he to her, she was not certain which; but something had been left unfinished. George

was watching her, watching her; she could feel it, and needed to escape into herself. How could she escape? He knew all about her now, she found him round the remotest corners of her mind. No, no, there were lovely things about her that he did not guess. If she could be alone for a few minutes she could find out what they were. . . . So this was love, this dreadful weakness. It ought to be so easy; free and easy, that gay old phrase; and the taut web of human nerves frustrated it. Beside her, in a glitter of light, Phyllis shone mysteriously. The touch of that warm hand had shocked Joyce. She knew now that they could never be at peace together.

"I'll go," she said suddenly.

Phyllis, still leaning forward, was listening.

"Was that one of the children?"

As Joyce rose, getting up with difficulty from the deep settee, Martin closed the sitting-room door with a quick push. Why did he do that? Now it would seem rude to go in there. George, whose ear was cocked toward upstairs, looked angrily at him.

"I didn't hear anything. You've got the children on the brain, Phyl."

"I'll go on the veranda while you think of something," Joyce said.

It was amusing to see how eagerly they all turned to the old almost forgotten pastime. She heard them mumbling together while they concerted their choice. They were like savages at a campfire, rehearsing some cheerful ceremonial to dispel sorcery. The bare mahogany of the dining table was glossed with panels of dim colour. This led her eyes upward to the red and blue window. It reminded her distantly of some poem, some perfect enchantment that mocked the poor futility of her own obsession. That most magic outcry of unreflecting love, from the most wretched of lovers: the eternal collision between life as dreamed and life as encountered.

There was a burst of laughter.

"She'll never guess that," she heard Ruth saying.

"All ready," George called.

"There are five of us, you can go round four times. You must ask questions that can be answered by Yes or No."

She began in the traditional way.

"Is it animal?"

"No," said Ruth.

"Is it vegetable?"

"Yes," said Phyllis.

"Is it in this room?"

"Yes," said Ben.

The part of her that was asking questions seemed separate from her racing undertow of feeling. She was the frightened child who was shy about games because she was always playing and watching simultaneously. What should she ask? It was vegetable and in the room. She had a preposterous eagerness to say something wildly absurd, she was weary of telling lies. If it had been Animal, she might have said "Is it George's love for me?" Their faces would have been comic. But it was Vegetable. . . . My vegetable love shall grow Vaster than empires and more slow . . . but if I quote that it will have to be explained. Why do poems insist on coming into the mind at instants of trouble?

"Is it Mr. Brook's cigar?"

"No," said George.

"Is it associated with some person in this room?"

"Yes," said Martin. A little self-consciously, she thought.

"Look here," George interrupted. "That answer of Phyl's wasn't quite right. Is it fair to say it's vegetable?"

"It *was* vegetable, vegetable in origin," Phyllis protested.

"Yes, but in a way it's animal too. It's *becoming* animal."

"Is it—any one's affection for any one else?" Joyce demanded promptly.

"No," said Ruth, amid general laughter.

"The difficulty with this game," said Phyllis, "is that there are so many questions you can't answer just Yes or No."

"That's why it's a good game," said George. "It's like life."

Joyce tried to recapitulate. It was in this room, associated with a person, it was vegetable in origin but becoming animal . . . but how absurd.

Perhaps they mean becoming *to* an animal, she thought.

"Is it Mrs. Granville's silver dress?"

"No."

"Is it anything to wear?"

"No."

"Is it associated with a man or a woman?"

"I can't answer that Yes or No," said George.

"Well, with a man?"

"Yes."

"Is it something I can see now?" she asked, looking directly at him.

"You're asking him twice," Martin said. "It's my turn."

Why did her mind keep straying away? Standing in the middle of the circle, she could feel them surrounding her, desiring her to divine this thing. Perhaps it was something she didn't want to guess, something that would mean——

She repeated the question, looking at Martin this time.

"No," he said, smiling.

Her mind was a blank. She went round the group again, asking almost at random. The succession of No's had a curiously numbing effect. But she knew, without having put the question directly, that it was something connected with Martin.

She came to Ben, on the last time round. She stared at his white canvas shoes, trying to think.

"Is it . . . is it——"

She turned away from the strong scent of his cigar. The glimmer of coloured light on the dining-room table caught and held her. It suggested:

"Something to do with a cake?"

"Yes," said Ben, amazed.

They were all startled, for her last attempts had been far off the track.

"Two more tries," said George, encouraging her.

She had a queer sensation that the back of her dress was open and reached unconsciously to but-

ton it. How silly, of course it's not open, it fastens on the shoulder. . . . A cake, a cake . . . there was a warm whiff of burning candles in the room. She knew now what it must be; what he had begun to tell her in the garden. . . . They were all crowding round her, tall people, voices coming down from above, wanting her to explain. Two more questions . . . *one* would do! Martin was standing behind George, he looked eager and yet anxious. She remembered now: the mouse, the mouse she had brought him; it was such a little thing; chosen and cherished for her difficult own; and the joy of giving away what was dearest . . . joy embittered by hostile scrutiny. . . .

Everything was all tangled up together. What had she given, a mouse to Martin or her truth to George? Oh, the pride, the fierce pride of now telling her pitiable secret. She could see the stripy pattern of George's coat, she knew exactly how it smelled. George looked eager and yet anxious——

No, George, no! her mind was crying miserably. It wasn't you, it wasn't you; I gave it to *him*——

She must not tell them that she had guessed it. George must be spared this last inconceivable edge of irony; and Martin must go away before either of them found out.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I can't get it."

George caught her arm as she swayed.

"I don't feel very well. Please forgive me. I think I'll go to bed."

"I knew she wouldn't guess it," said Ruth.

"Of course it wasn't really fair," said George. "She couldn't possibly know about the slice of cake Mr. Martin had. But it was queer how close she came."

## XVI

**G**EORGE stood uneasily on the landing, halfway up the stair. The house seemed over-populated. Upstairs was a regular dormitory, he thought angrily: all down the long passage he could hear the stealthy movement of people going to bed: doors opening cautiously, reconnoiterings to see whether the bathroom trail was clear. And the ground floor was worse: Joyce in the sitting room filled the whole place with her presence. He could not stay in the hall, the dining room, or the porch, without being in sight or hearing of her sanctuary. Against his will he lingered on the thought of her there, the small ugly chamber transfigured by her intimacy. Even the dull brown wood of the door was different now, it thrilled him with unbearable meaning, his mind pierced through it and saw her loveliness—perhaps tormented like himself with farcical horrors. It was unbearable to think of her going away into the dark nothing of these empty hours, un comforted. Why couldn't he go and tuck her in like one of the children? She seemed to him just that, a fright-

ened child who had somehow crept into his arms. She was there, divided from him only by that senseless panel. He imagined her prostrate on the couch in a quiver of silent tears; she, exquisite, made for delight, whose pitiful reality had shaken his solid, well-carpentered life into this crazy totter.

My God, he reflected, I thought I had got beyond this sort of thing.

There was a creak at the stair head; he saw her above him, shadowy against the bay window. In her translucent wrap she was delicately sketched in cloudy brightness, young and firm of outline. So the door had been mocking him. With a twinge of self-disgust he shrank, stumbled down the stairs, tiptoed out and took refuge at the far end of the garden.

A splinter of light drew him to the table under the pine trees. The jug and glasses, left there since lunch time; mutely pathetic, as forgotten things always are. There was still a heeltap of tea in one of the tumblers, he drank it and found it sirupy with sugar. It's a mistake, he thought, to eat sweet things late at night: they turn to sour in the morning. Night is the time for something bitter.

In the house, yellow squares flashed on and off. Downstairs, he could see Joyce's shadow against

the blind. At the other end of the building, in the gable, the spare-room window went dark. Martin had slipped off to bed rather oddly after their game. In the embarrassment of Joyce's momentary dizziness he had simply gone, without a word. George found himself thinking that much of the evening's difficulty was due to this bumpkin stranger. He was probably well-meaning, but either with his idiotic pleasantries or a silent smirk of censure he had a gift for blighting things. There was nothing about him that you could put precise finger on, but he had a way of making one feel guilty. How queerly, too, he had looked at Joyce.

The evening was changing. The air had shifted toward the northwest; suddenly, over the comb of the overhanging dune, a silvery spinnaker of cloud came drifting. It was like a great puff of steam, so close and silent it frightened him. For an instant, passing under the moon, this lovely island of softness darkened the night to a foggy grey. It was something strange, a secret between himself and the weather, encouraging his silly wits not to be afraid of the desperate magic of fancy, the fear and tenderness hidden in men's hearts.

He turned again toward the house, and saw that now Joyce's window was black. She was there,

at rest; he blessed her being in that little room. He had thought of it only as opening into the main thoroughfare of the house; but it was open, too, into the garden and freedom. What did the door matter! She was there, shining. He could speak to her. He imagined her voice, her trembling husky whisper, when she heard him at the sill. Why is kindness always whispered, while anger is so loud? How delightful if people shouted "I love you!" as though it were an insult. Glorious, to stand under the window and halloo it at her, watch the house rouse with scandalized life! Ah, what friends we might have been if they hadn't made us whisper. Why did they force us to be lovers?

Then he remembered—the accurate circumstantial memory of the householder. The window was screened. To speak to her through a wire mesh—intolerable. Besides, it might only make matters worse. He could never tell her his own joy, and might merely smirch hers. They might only struggle dumbly in the grotesque antic of spirits whose moods cannot mingle. The moment had passed. Life had gone by him, while he was fretting over paltry trifles, and left him a drudge. There was nothing to do but go indoors and work on the booklet. How exciting that brochure would be, what marvellous advertising, if he could

really tell what summer was like at the Island. Why, the company would have to run special trains. The very aisles would be packed, people sitting on up-ended suitcases, if they knew that this dangerous coast was the place where Temptation really broke through . . . where the old Demiurge laid his cards on the table. It would become a Resort—yes, an asylum for lunatics, people ridiculed by transfusions of the moon. How a poet might write it, telling the colour of that world. Warm tawny flanks of sand hills, sprawled like panthers. The sun a coal of topaz, veiled in white flame that sheeted the whole summit of sky. Light so fierce one never looked upward. Wherever one turned was a burning and a glitter; the air was a lens and gathered all its rays into one stream. Always one's knuckles were sweet with salty smell. Repressed thunder yawning in the blue elixir of the afternoon: deep, deep afternoon, penetrated with lawless beauty. The small sorry whisper of the wind sang it in the keen scimitar grasses; smooth beams of driftwood, faded by the sea, felt it; the sandpipers, drunk with it, staggered on twiggy legs. Bronzed thighs and shoulders, shining in the green shallows marbled with foam. . . .

The transitive billow of cloud slipped away

beyond the roof; again the strong resinous air was clarified, streamed with gracious light. His mind almost smiled at his fatuity: the sentiment did not graduate into an actual smile, but spent itself in a tiny whiff of self-deprecation through his nostrils. He stretched upward, raising his arms, standing tiptoed, feeling the calf-tendons tighten and coolness in his fingers as the blood sank. His hands met a low limb that reached across his head. He gripped it and chinned himself. There was good animal satisfaction in feeling the quiver in the biceps, the hanging weight of his body. Well, we're not done for yet, he said to himself. No, sir, not yet. He capered a few dance steps on the silky floor of needles, and pulled out his pipe. . . .

She was coming. He saw her coming, swiftly across the lawn. No, not swiftly; evenly was the word; unquestioningly; as he had always known she would come. His mouth was open to warn her of the croquet hoops, but she passed surely among them. When he saw her face, he knew this was something not to be spoiled by words. Her face was enough.

In that unreasonable glamour she was pure fable: the marble (Oh, too cold, too hard a word) come to life. There was no pang, no trouble, no desire;

he knew only that there is some answer to the gorgeous secret: the secret that the world is in conspiracy to deny—— No, not to deny; more cunning than that: to admit and pass heedless on. There was meaning in everything; significance in the shapes of things. The black plumes and pinacles of the trees were fashioned exactly so, could never have been otherwise.

They were away from rooms and roofs. They were on the beach; the tide was far ebbcd, they ran over mirrors of sand, they were in sparkling black water milder than air. Still there were no words; their white bodies gleamed in silver, laved in snowy fans of surf. They were just themselves, chafing impediments were gone; nothing was between them and they wanted nothing. They ran, breathing warmly, to burrow in the powdery cliff, where the acid smell of sharp grasses sifted down from the dunes. They lay in a hollow of sand; she curled against him, nestled smoothly close, he could feel her thrilling with small quivers of joy. There was no pang, no trouble, no desire; only peace.

Everything else they had ever known had been only an interruption. This had always been happening, underneath. It was the unknown music for which their poem had been written. They were quit of the pinch of Time, the facetious

nudge of Custom. Quietness was in them, satient like fresh water in a thirsty throat. Here was the fulfilment men plot and swink for: and how different from crude anticipation. What could there be now but pity and kindness? Here was triumph: Man, the experimenting artist, had created fantasy above the grasp of his audience, Nature. Like any true artist, he must always play a little above his audience's head.

"Now I'm going to tell you the truth," he said happily, and waited a moment for the luxury of her voice.

She was silent. He turned to look; her face was anxious.

"Why is it," he said gently, "that when you announce you're going to tell the truth, people always expect something disagreeable?"

Then he knew that the sand was chill and gritty. A breeze was blowing, the light was dim and meagre. This was not the glad forgiving sun but the cold and glassy moon.

"No, no!" she cried. "You must never tell the truth in a dream. If you do . . . it happens."

"But this was a lovely truth," he began. A window snapped into brightness beside him, just

above his head. Phyllis was looking from the pantry.

“George! What on earth are you muttering about out there? Come in and help me cut sandwiches.”

## XVII

**H**E WAS startled to find Phyllis at work in her nightgown. Another hallucination, perhaps, he thought sardonically. Everything seems to burlesque everything else.

She had thrown aside her blue quilted wrapper and was busy slicing and spreading. The table was crowded with bread, ham, beef, lettuce, mustard, jam, and cheese. The Picnic. George had forgotten the menace of the Picnic. It struck him as pathetic to see her valiantly preparing the details of this festival which was already doomed and damned. She was chopping off little brown corners of crust. Wasteful, as usual; besides, the crust is the best part. He managed not to say so, remembering that he had made the remark every time he had ever seen her cut sandwiches. The lace yoke at her neck had two tiny buds of blue ribbon stitched in it. There was something pitiably nuptial about them. How soft and young she was in her flimsy robe. Her eyes were smudged with fatigue. How beautiful she would have looked to any other man.

"My dear child, cutting sandwiches in your best nightgown."

"I haven't anything better to do in it, have I?"

"Yes, you have. Go to bed in it."

He held the wrapper for her.

"Put this on. I'll open the door. Whew, it's hot in here. I'll finish all this for you."

The blade of the long carving knife continued, small definite crunches.

"You can have your sardines. I found a box in the pantry. There isn't any key for them, you'll have to use the can opener."

The warm kitchen air was like a stupor. This was the steady heart of the house. Ghostly moonlight might wash up to the sill, fragile fancies pervade other rooms: here strong central life went calmly on. In the range red coals slept deep, covered and nourished for the long night. The tall boiler, its silvery paint flaked and dulled, gave off drowsy heat. Under the table the cat Virginia, who was not to be shocked, lay solidly upright with her paws tucked in, sated with scraps and vibrating a strong stupid purr. The high grimed ceiling was speckled with motionless flies, roosting there after a hard day. Packages of groceries, series of yellow bowls and platters, were ranged on the shelves in comfortable order. This was not a

modern kitchen, shiny, white and sterile, like a hospital. It was old, ugly, inconvenient, strong with the memory of meals arduously prepared; meals of long ago, for people now vanished.

"The weather's changing," he said. "I don't know if to-morrow will be fine or not."

He wondered at himself: able to speak so lightly, as if everything was usual. His mind was still trudging back, up clogging sand hills, from a phantom bend of shore.

"If it rains, we'll have our sandwiches at home. I've promised Lizzie the day off."

He saw a quick horrible picture of the Picnic spread in the dining room, rain driving outside, the children peevish, themselves angrily mute.

"There's cold chicken in the ice box; please get it out and slice it for salad sandwiches. I don't think Mr. Martin cares much for beef, I noticed at lunch."

"What does he think he is? Some kind of Messiah? If he doesn't like our ways, what did he come butting in for?"

He checked himself. The moment was ripe for quarrel, the gross mustard-sharpened air seemed to suggest it. He put the carcass of fowl on the scrubbed drain board by the sink and began to

carve. Standing so, his back was toward her. He made some pretext to turn, hoping to divine her mood; but her face was averted. There was ominous restraint in the shape of her back. The anticlimax of all this, the delicatessen-shop smell, after his ecstasy in the garden, fretted his nerves. Brutal shouts of wrath clamoured in his mind. It was infuriating to see her so appealing: can't one *ever* get away from it, must a man love even his wife? He wanted to ask her this, but feared she would miss the humour of it. He longed to horrify her with his rage, so that he could get rid of it and then show the tenderness he secretly felt. Certainly I'm the colossus of sentimentalists, he thought. I can turn directly from one kind of love to another. Queer, the way it looks now it's my feeling for Joyce that is disinterested and pure, my love for Phyl that's really carnal. How did this morality business get so mixed up?

He amused himself by putting the slivers of chicken in two piles: the dark meat for Martin, the white for Joyce. How white she had been in the surf. . . . But that was only a dream. This is real, this is earnest. This is Now, I'm cutting sandwiches for the Picnic. This is what Time is doing to me; what is it doing to her? How did our

two Times get all knotted up together? He found himself affectionately stroking a smooth slice of chicken breast.

There was something in Phyllis's silence that pricked him. He looked uneasily over his shoulder. She had sat down in the chair by the table, her chin leaning on one wrist, watching him. He went to her and touched her shoulder gently.

"Go to bed, Phyl dear."

"George, can't we get away from this house?"

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Get away. Take me away, George; we'll take the children and go. To-night. Before anybody wakes up."

She rose suddenly.

"I'm frightened. Take me away. George, I can't live through to-morrow, not if it's like to-day."

Just the way I feel, he thought.

"There, there, little frog, you're all frazzled out. It'll be all right, don't worry. Go and get your sleep."

"No, I'm not tired. I wish I were. I'm all burning up with *not* being tired. George, we could take the babies and just get in the car and go. Go anywhere, anywhere where there isn't

anybody.—We'll take Miss Clyde with us if you like. She's frightened too."

"Don't be absurd."

"George, it would be such fun; when they all came down to breakfast, Ben and Ruth and Mr. Martin, we just wouldn't be here. Never come back, never see this place again."

"You're raving, Phyl. Why, I took this house specially for you. Besides, you know I can't go away now, I've got this booklet to finish."

She looked so miserable, so desperate, his anger began to throb.

"You can write a booklet about something else. You know you can, they're all crazy to get your stuff. George, you're so big and clever, you can do anything. Miss Clyde can illustrate it. I don't mind your loving her, I'll be sensible, just take us away before the Picnic. Go and wake her now, she can go in her wrapper, you'll like that."

"Damnation," he burst out, "don't talk such tripe. I believe you're crazy. It's this half-wit Martin who's got on your nerves. I've got a mind to wake *him* up, throw him out of the house. What the devil did you ask him in for?"

"It's my fault. But he's changed so, since this morning. We've all changed. We're not the same people we were."

She pushed her arms up inside the sleeves of his coat and caught his elbows. He remembered that cherished way of hers, unconscious appeal to old tendernesses. He looked down on the top of her head, into the warm hollow where his head had lain. Her neck's prettier than Joyce's, he thought bitterly.

"It's queer *you* should hate him so," she said.

"What do you mean?" He pulled his arms away.

"Oh, I don't know what I mean. Perhaps he—perhaps he *is* what you said."

"What, a half-wit?"

"A kind of Messiah. They come to make silly people unhappy, don't they?"

He looked at her in cold amazement and disgust. Only a few moments ago he had been afraid of her; but now, by showing her poor thoughts, she had put herself at his mercy.

"You go to bed," he said. "I'm sick of this nonsense." He gripped her shoulders roughly and pushed her toward the door.

"Please, just let me put away the sandwiches. I want to wrap them in wet napkins so they'll keep fresh."

"Forget the damn sandwiches."

"Not damn, *ham* sandwiches." She couldn't

help laughing. It was so paltry to have him propelling her like a punishable child.

"Ham, jam, or damn, forget them!" he cried, raging. "You and your Messiah have ruined this Picnic anyhow. You spoiled it because you knew I looked forward to it. You've plotted against it, sneered at me and at Joyce because you knew I admired her."

"Admired her! Oh, is that the word?"

The little sarcasm hummed like a tuning fork in some silent chamber of his mind.

"You fool," he said. "Are you trying to push her into my arms?"

"I guess she can find the way without pushing."

"Well, you *are* a fool," he said slowly, in a dull voice that struck her deeper than any temper could have done. "You throw away love as if it was breadcrusts."

With a furious sweep he was about to hurl the neat piles of her handiwork on the floor. In one last salvage of decency he altered the course of his hand. He seized a fistful of the little brown strips of crust and flung them wildly across the room. The carving knife clattered off the table.

"You're frightening Virginia," was all she said.

Anger, the red and yellow clown, burst through the tight paper hoop of his mind and played gro-

tesque unlaughable capers. Bewildered by his own ferocity he strode to the corner, swung open the door of the back stairs, and pointed savagely upward. She went without another word. Her blue eyes were very large and dark, they faced him with the unwavering defiance he detested and admired. Good old Phyl, he couldn't help thinking. She's unbeatable. Now, as usual, he had put himself in the wrong. He crashed the door behind her, and stood listening to her slow steps.

He soothed the cat with some sardine-tails, finished making the chicken sandwiches, wrapped them carefully as Phyllis had suggested. I wonder what we'll be thinking when we eat them? As he put them away in the ice box he noticed the cocoanut cake on a shelf. With a sense of retaliation he cut himself a thick slice. He became aware of the scrambling tick of the alarm clock on the dresser. A quarter past eleven. The house was thrillingly still. The serenely dormant kitchen slowly sobered the buffoon dancing in his brain.

He fetched his precious bottle of Sherwood and poured a minim dose. The golden drug saluted him gently. In this fluid too the flagrant miracle lay hidden, the privy atom of truth and fury. The guest of honour, he thought ironically, feeling his vitals play host to that courteous warmth.

The guest of honour, always expelled. A spark falls into your soul. Shall you cherish it, shelter it to clear consuming flame; or shall you hurry to stamp it out? Can a man take fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned? The smell of burning cloth is mighty disagreeable. Vacantly he studied the label on the bottle. *Manufactured prior to Jan. 17, 1920. These spirits were tax paid at the non-beverage rate FOR MEDICINAL PURPOSES ONLY. Sale or use for other purposes will subject the seller or user to very heavy penalties.* Well, certainly this is a Medicinal Use, he thought. "If ever a seaman wanted drugs, it's me." Where did the phrase come from? . . . Yes, old Billy Bones, in *Treasure Island*.

Well, these foolishnesses would have blown over by to-morrow. Do a little work on the booklet and then turn in. He must get the thing done, earn some money. The gruesome burden of expenses. How little Phyllis realizes the load a man's mind carries. I suppose she carries one too, poor child. Every mind carries the weight of the whole world.

He was on hands and knees, picking up the scraps of crust that had fallen under the boiler. In a luxurious self-pity he found himself humming a hymn tune. Blessed solitude, where a man can

sing to himself and admire the sweet sorrow of his own cadence! An almost forgotten poem came into his head and fitted pleasantly to the air.

*The Silver Girl she came to me when spring was  
dancing green,  
She said, "I've come to wait on you and keep your  
cabin clean;  
To wash your face and hands and feet, and make your  
forehead cool—  
I'll get you into Heaven yet, you Damned Old Fool.*

Something in this appealed nicely to his mood. He allowed himself an encore. His voice, rising behind the stove, got a good resonance. Then he heard a footfall, a door opening. Ah, he thought, Phyl has come down to say she's sorry for being so crude. Well, I'll let her speak first. I'm tired of always being the one to make advances.

He waited, industriously gathering crusts, though he felt that the posture of Lazarus was not advantageous. There was no word.

"Well," he said impatiently, "have you had enough of your funny business?"

He turned, and saw Nounou's amazed face in the aperture of the back door. With an incoherent murmur he rose, took his bottle, and stalked out of the kitchen.

## XVIII

IT WOULD be interesting to speculate," said page 38 of George's treatise, "how such a cheery little town obtained the name Dark Harbour. Perhaps it was due to the scenic background of rugged hills that overlooks the picturesque old fishing port and reflects its invigorating pine woods in the water. At any rate, the future of the place is bright indeed. The Eastern Railroad's express service now stops there, and large metropolitan interests have pledged themselves to the erection of a modern caravansary which will supplement the long famous 'folksy' hospitality of the Bayview Hotel. Separated only by a lengthy trestle from the mainland, the Island spreads its varied allure of rolling sand dunes, pine groves, and broad shallow beaches. Shaped like a crescent, its outward curve is buffeted by the mighty ocean; on the inner side, sheltered from easterly gales by the unique sand hills, is the comfortable cottage colony where a number of wise people have been vacationing for many years. Many artists have discovered the pictorial charm

of the region, and find in the forests or in the maritime life of the Bay subjects for their water colours and oils. Canvases that have later become famous in academies and exhibitions have first felt the brush in those shingled studios clustered about the old inn, renowned for its savoury chowder. There is a brilliance in the air, an almost Italian richness of colour, in the Island's landscape. It will be many years before so vast a terrain can become crowded, but many new bungalows have been built lately, and the newcomers pay tribute to the good taste of those who, a generation ago, divined Dark Harbour's magic as a haven of summer tranquillity."

He felt a rational pride in this composition. It was in the genially fulsome vein esteemed by railroad companies. Even if people weren't tranquil, in a place so competently described, they ought to be. He thought there was a neatness in that touch about Dark Harbour and its bright future. Phyllis was probably right when she often said it was a shame Mr. Granville should spend his talents in mere publicity work when he might so easily write something famous—fiction, for instance. These are my fictions, he always replied, pointing to his private shelf of advertising pamphlets, neatly bound and gilded as his Works.

He had spread out his papers on the dining table, where he could write without seeing Joyce's door. But he couldn't seem to resume the flow of that slick treacly style, which the experienced brochurist can smoothly decant, like a tilted molasses barrel. The discomfiting irony of the last word penetrated him. He changed "Italian richness" to "Italian passion," but that was as far as inspiration carried him. It was vain to remind himself that Walter Scott had written novels all night long, that Napoleon had planned campaigns in the agony of stomach-ache, that Elbert Hubbard was never at a loss for a Little Journey. In a nervous fidget he pared his nails, sharpened pencils, rearranged the glasses on the sideboard, emptied Ben's cigar débris from the living-room ash tray. He trod stealthily, in stocking feet, for fear of disturbing Joyce. Without his usual couch to sleep on, his usual table to work at, he felt homeless. There was a dull pain at the bottom of his ribs. He tried to remember whether he had unduly bolted his food at dinner. Perhaps he was going to have appendicitis.

He had a sort of insane desire to justify his existence, to atone for a day of such incredible futility by getting some work done. If every possible extraneous trifle could be attended to perhaps his

mind might be calmed. He crept upstairs to clean his teeth and found that Phyllis had put his dressing gown and pyjamas and slippers on the window seat. Was that a softening overture, or a hint that she did not want him in the bedroom? He tiptoed warily to the balcony to glance at the children. Even in sleep Sylvia was still the coquette: she lay with one hand curled against her cheek, the most ravishing pose, her face a lovely fragile gravity. Janet was restless, muttering something about bathing.

He undressed, sitting on the window seat. With a vague notion of postponing the struggle with the pamphlet he went through his routine with unusual care, watching the details. He noticed for the first time his ingenious attempt to retain the tip of each sock, by curling his toes into it as he removed it. The purpose was evidently to turn the sock completely inside out in the one motion of stripping it off. For the first time in weeks he decided to fold his trousers neatly instead of just throwing them on a chair. He gave them a preliminary shake and found that the sand lodged in the cuffs flew unerringly into his eyes. He discovered that if he tried to put the left leg into his pyjamas first, instead of the right, it didn't feel as though he had them on at all. The laundress

had managed to let the end of the waist-string vanish inside its little tunnel of hem. It required some very sharp work to creep it out again. What a good booklet could be written, for some pyjama and underwear manufacturer, on The Technique of Getting Undressed. How pleasant that if you lay out your clothes just in the order of their discarding they are exactly serialized in the correct sequence for dressing to-morrow.

All this, he felt with subtle horror, was just a postponement of something inevitable, something he knew was coming but could not identify. Some great beauty of retribution had him in its onward march. He was unworthy of the glory of living, he had niggled and haggled and somewhere in his bunglings he had touched some fatal spring. He had broken some seal, let the genie out of the bottle. The little whiff of fragrant vapour had flowed and spread until it darkened the whole sky. It hung terrible above him and the four tiny Georges cowered beneath it. And behind and within every other thought was Joyce. He could see her, perfect, inaccessible, afraid. This dear device of Nature, this gay, simple ingenuity of dividing life into halves and making them hanker for one another! Oh, Joyce, Joyce, it *does* matter. Joyce, I need you so.

A craven impulse tempted him to turn in at once, on the window seat; but its curved shape was not comfortable; moreover, how could he possibly sleep? Downstairs the big couch had a lamp by it; he could read, and while reading, think. The principal pleasure of reading, he had always found, is to fix the attention of the coarse outer mind, allowing the inner faculty to slip free. As he went down the clock startled him by counting midnight. He timed his step on the creaky treads so that the chime would cover them. But that settled it, he thought. One can *continue* working after twelve, but one can't possibly begin work at that hour. Besides, it's impossible to be conscientious in dressing gown and slippers. Morals, conscience, ambition, all the cunning artifice of custom, are laid aside with the garments of the day. The sophistries of virtue avail you nothing now. The thing in your heart that you are angriest at and most ashamed of, that is God. And that's what gods are invented for: to be despised and rejected. A god who was honoured and welcomed, how unhappy he would be.

He lay down on the couch with a book, but his mind ran wild behind the printed lines. The weight and breathing of the silent house pressed about him. How well he knew that feeling of a

house at night. All the others, broken at last by the day's long war of attrition, lost in their silence; himself the sole survivor, gleaning stupidly over the battlefield. Matching his lonely wit against destiny, aware of a shuddering compassion for these unruly lives under his charge. What was it that kept them all going? Only his dreams, his poor busy ideas. For the moment he could feel the whole fabric transfigured with truth and tenderness; with love that was furious and clean, with work that was sane and absorbing. What did he really care whether thousands of people did or did not spend their summer on the Great Scenic Route of the Eastern Railroad? Or whether they bedded on the Morrison Mattress, that Makes Sleep a Career?

He slipped to his knees beside the sofa, but he could not even pray. He was aware of the door behind him, and of Phyllis in the room overhead. How terrible if any one should find him on his knees. Praying is only respectable if done in congregations. He remembered those cold evenings long ago, when he and Phyllis couldn't sleep unless she were pressed close behind him, her arm across his chest. And now he was living among strangers. I'll do whatever you tell me, I'll do whatever you tell me. But by heaven he had glimpsed it: he

had seen beauty within breath and grasp: too close to mar it by selfishness. No, said his demon, you shan't even have the consolation of fine words. You shall have all the mockery and none of the bliss.

I suppose biology's pulling my leg, he reflected. . . .

He must have been kneeling there a long time. His forehead was numb from pressing on the ridged tapestry of the couch. At least you don't need the light on when you're trying to pray. The bills are big enough as it is. He rose stiffly and snicked off the current.

At the foot of the stair he paused. If Joyce were awake he might hear her stir. His hand gripped the carved newel, then slid onto the smooth ascent of the banister rail. He stood a moment, and turned away.

The bedroom was dim. The blinds were not all the way down, dregs of that sparkling moonlight flowed underneath. Phyllis was asleep, he could see her head against the white linen. She lay as she always did, at the far side of the bed, turned away from the door, her arms crossed, one hand perching on her shoulder, the other tucked under

the pillow. He went softly round the foot of the bed, stepping aside to avoid her slippers. He knew by instinct exactly where they would be.

Crouched at the bedside, he slid one arm under the pillow to find her hand. His fingers met a small damp handkerchief.

He gathered her into his arms. Out of some far-off vacancy she moved drowsily and welcomed him home. They knew every curve of their old embrace. Here was no fear and no doubting. Here was his consolation. Who was ever more beautiful? The tiny flattened handkerchief, was it not a pathetic symbol of the bruised mercies of love? Ah, be slow to mock the plain, simplest things: good-byes, angers, fidelities, renunciations.

He held her close and more close. Then, with a gruesome pang, he checked the name that was on his lips. In the poor comedy of his heart there was room for but one thought: gratitude to Joyce; Joyce who in the unstained bravery of her spirit had taught him anew the worth and miracle of love and whose only reward had been suffering. Her name, so long echoed in his unuttered voice, now filled his mind and terrified him. Here, with Phyllis in his arms, he was thinking of her; this frail ghost of passion came between them. In

physical sickness his embrace grew faint. It could not be: the last scruple of his manhood revolted against this consummate deceit.

Still half in dream, Phyllis divined him laggard. She crept closer. "Oh, Martin, Martin," she whispered. "I knew you'd come."

Now he knew where the dark current of the hours had been bearing him. Nothing else was possible. Quietly, without anger or surprise, in the relief of one free to face his destiny, he left the room and went down the stair. His hand was out to turn the knob when he saw that Joyce's door was opening toward him.

## XIX

**J**OYCE lay in a trance of weariness. A nervous tremolo shivered up and down from her knees to her stomach; her spirit seemed lost and dragged under into the strange circling life of the body, stubborn as that of a tree, that goes on regardless of the mind. I don't care, she thought, I'm glad I'm alive. She was too inert to close her hot eyes or turn over into the pillow to shut out sounds from her sharpened ears. She heard George's step on the garden path, Phyllis come downstairs and go to the kitchen. Beneath everything else was the obbligato of the house itself; twinges of loose timbers, the gurgle and rush of plumbing, creak of beds, murmuring voices, soft shut of doors. Tenacious life reluctantly yielding itself to oblivion. Then into this fading recession came the low sough in the pines, the slackening volleys of the crickets like a besieging army that had withdrawn its troops. And the far-away cry of a train. She imagined it, trailing panes of golden light along the shore, or perhaps darkly

curtained sleeping cars partitioned into narrow kennels where mysterious people lay alone: and the bursting silver plume of its whistle, spirting into the cool night, tearing a jagged rent in silence, shaking the whole membrane of elastic air that enveloped them all, a vibration that came undulating over the glittering bay, over the lonely beaches, trembled beside her and went throbbing away. . . . She hadn't been down to the beach yet, past the rolling dunes that gave her childhood a first sense of fatal solitude. She tried to remember how that shore looked: wideness, sharp air, the exact curved triangle of sails leaning into unseen sweetness of breeze, steep slides of sand over-tufted above by toppling clumps of grass. If one could escape down there and go bathing in moonlight; come back cleansed, triumphant.

The whisper at the window sill startled her. She knew Bunny at once.

"You must get him away. Before it's too late, before he knows."

Joyce understood perfectly; so perfectly it didn't seem necessary to say anything. This was just what she had been telling herself.

She nodded.

"I kept calling him while you were all in the

living room. I was here at this window. He won't listen. He thinks I'm just teasing him."

Joyce remembered Martin closing the door.

"Then I called *you*. I was so afraid you wouldn't hear me. It's awful to be helpless."

"Bunny, you're not helpless. Tell me what to do."

"What room is he in?"

"I don't know. Yes, I do, I think it's at the end of the passage, next the bath."

"The old nursery. Oh, if I could come indoors. I can't; they've forgotten me."

"We'll manage," Joyce whispered. "I always knew you and I would have to help each other."

"He must find something to take him back. You are the one who can help."

Joyce knew there was some secret here too beautiful to be said. Bunny could not tell her, it must be guessed.

"Is it something I gave him?"

"Something you'd like to keep."

"Is it the mouse? Bunny, how can we find it? That was a lifetime ago."

"Perhaps it's in the nursery. In the old toy cupboard."

"I'll get it in the morning."

"That may be too late. Now, to-night."

"Oh Bunny, tell me plainly. Is it the mouse you mean?"

She was tugging fiercely to raise the screen, jammed in its grooves. Her fingers still tingled from the sharp edges of the shallow metal sockets. Only the empty garden, the sinking candy-peel moon beyond the black arc of hill.

The impression was vivid upon her. There was only one thing to do, she must go through the sleeping house to Martin's room, rouse him, tell him at once. She rose from bed and opened the door.

He was there, holding out his hand; motionless as though he had been waiting so all the shining night. She took it mechanically.

"Who is it?" she said.

"Who else could it be?"

But at first she had thought it was Martin, somehow warned by Bunny. They stood aghast of one another, in silence, awkwardly holding hands. It was not like a meeting, it was like a good-bye.

The declining moonlight limned her cloudily. But this was no silly dream. He saw her revealed in all her wistful beauty, meant from the beginning for him.

"George, we must get Martin out of the house —"

Martin again. Evidently, he thought, the gods intend to wring the last drop of comedy out of me.

"Damn Martin," he said softly. "Joyce, I didn't find you at last to talk about *him*. Dear, I told you we'd know it if the time came."

Was this what Bunny meant by giving? I have nothing to give. The Me he loves has gone somewhere. How can I tell him? Instead of the imagined joy and communion there's only horror. And I want so to love him.

He had carried her to the couch and was kneeling beside her. Oh, if I could lay down the burden of this heavy, heavy love. If I could love him gladly, not just bitterly. Is this the only way to save him from knowing? Such a little thing, that I wanted to keep for myself. She turned from him convulsively and buried her face in the pillow. He mustn't see my tears. The cruellest thing is he'll think I don't love him. No man was ever so loved. But I gave myself, long ago, to the dream of him. I can't mix it with the reality.

She turned, in a mercy of pure tenderness.

"George, dear George, I meant what I said."

I'll do whatever you tell me, I'll do whatever you tell me. But he divined her misery. The brave words trembled. She lay before him, white, inaccessible, afraid. Exquisite, made for delight.

with every grace that the brave lust of man has dreamed; and weariness, anxiety, some strange disease of the spirit, frustrated it. Their love too was a guest of honour, a god to be turned away. She lay there, her sweet body the very sign and symbol of their need, and he knew nothing but pity, as for a wounded child. In that strange moment his poor courage was worthy of hers. God pity me for a fool, he thought. But I love her best of all because I shall never have her.

"I'm going to tell you the truth," he began——

A jarring crash shook the house, followed by a child's scream. He rose heavily to his feet, tightened and nauseated with terror. He knew exactly what must have happened. The railing on the sleeping porch, which he had forgotten to mend. One of the children had got out of bed, stumbled against it, the rotten posts had given way. If she had fallen from that height . . . he pictured a broken white figure on the gravel. This was his punishment for selfishness and folly. Oh, it is always the innocent who suffer.

With heaviness in his feet he hurried through the dining room and veranda. All was still. Looking up he could see the balcony unaltered. Then, through the open windows above he heard the

unmistakable clang of metal on a wooden floor. Ben's bed.

Unable to shake off his conviction of disaster he ran upstairs. Phyllis was crouching in the passage, comforting Janet. "I had a bad dream," the child sobbed, "then there was that awful noise."

"There, there, darling, you're all right now. We all have dreams sometimes. You can come into bed with Mother."

There was the bleat of one of the talking dolls. "*Maaa-Maa!*" it cried, and Sylvia appeared, sleepily stolid. "Is it to-morrow?" she asked.

"I thought the porch had broken down," said Phyllis hysterically. "George, did you fix that railing?"

"Nonsense. The porch is all right. Get back to sleep, little toads."

"What was it, Ben's bed?"

"Ben's! No such luck, it's mine," said Ruth, opening the door. "Where does the light turn on? I can't find the button." She saw George and gave a squeak of dismay.

She needn't be so damned skittish, he thought angrily. Nightgowns don't seem to be any novelty in this house. "Phyl, you take Janet into bed, I'll put Sylvia on the window seat. Keep

them off that porch till I've mended the railing in the morning."

Ben was grumbling over the wreckage. "George, what's the secret of this thing? Lend a hand."

"I'm frightfully sorry," said George. "I ought to have warned you. Here, I can fix it, there's a bit of clothes line —"

"For Heaven's sake, don't start tinkering now," said Ruth, who had dived into the other bed. "I'm all right here, and Ben can sleep on the mattress."

Her door was open, she stood anxiously waiting as he came downstairs at last. She had put on her wrapper, he noticed with a twinge.

"Ruth's bed had a blow-out," he said. "At least I thought *she* was safe when she's between the sheets." He felt that he ought to want to laugh, but he had no desire to. I suppose it's because I've got no sense of humour. "Mr. Martin seems the only one who knows that night is meant to forget things in. Well, let him sleep. He'll be on his way early in the morning."

She did not answer at once, searching for the words that would help him most.

"I must go too. George, you must let me. I'd only spoil your Picnic."

"You'll miss a lot of nice sandwiches," he said bitterly. "I made them myself, white meat."

With divine perception she saw the nature of his wound, the misery of his shame and self-abasement. It was not love of her he needed now, but love of himself, to keep life in him.

"We wouldn't have any chance to be *us*, we couldn't talk, we must say it now."

He remembered that once they had promised themselves they would never say it.

"It's better so, I suppose. Then there won't be even one sorrow that we haven't shared."

"Sorrow?" she said. "Let's call it joy. Dear, I shall always worship you as the bravest and most generous I have ever known. To do without things one can't have, what credit is that? But to do without what one might have had . . . George, let me try to get a little rest. I feel so ill."

He tucked her in and patted her shoulder.

"Good-night, dear," he said. "Don't worry. Everything will be all right in the morning. God bless you. . . . Don't forget any of the things I haven't told you."

She knew that this was as near being one of his Moments as he could be expected to manage. He had turned the corner, at least three of the Georges

would live. And the Fourth—well, she had that one where nothing mortal now could blot or stain him. For ever.

“In the morning” . . . it was morning already. As he lay down on the couch he could feel, rather than see, the first dim fumes of day. The brief hush and interim was over, the pink moon had gone. The last of the crickets flung the password to the birds, treetops began to warble. A new link in the endless chain picked up the tension of life. Somewhere over the hillside a cock was crowing his brisk undoubting cheer.

So this was what they called victory. What was the saying?— One more such victory. . . . Not even those last merciful words of hers could acquit him of his own damnation. All the irony, none of the bliss. The world hung about his neck like the Mariner’s dead albatross. The charnel corpse clung to him, rotting, with bony skull and jellied festering eye. But even the Mariner was worthier, having killed the bird; he himself had only maimed it. There would not even be the sharp numbing surgery of good-bye. Endlessly, through long perspectives of pain, he could see themselves meeting, smiling and parting, to encounter once more round the next corner of mem-

ory and all the horror to be lived again. We're experienced in partings, he had said once.

The gradual summer dawn crept up the slopes of earth, brimmed and brightened, and tinctures of lavender stained the sweetened air. The hours when sleep is happiest, ere two and two have waked to find themselves four, and the birds pour the congested music of night out of their hearts. And the day drew near: the day when men are so reasonable, canny, and well-bred; when colour comes back to earth and beneficent weary necessities resume; the healthful humorous day, the fantastic day that men do well to take so seriously as it distracts them from their unappeasable desires. With an unheard buzz of cylinders the farmer's flivver twirled up the back lane and brought the morning milk.

JANET was surprised to find that she had gone abroad during the night. She was puzzled until she noticed that where she lay she could see herself reflected in the dressing-table mirror, which was tilted forward a little. The shoehorn, that held it at the proper angle for Mother's hair, had slipped down. So the whole area of the big bed was visible in the glass, and the mounded hill of white blanket that must be Mother. Under the snug tent of bedclothes Janet could feel the radiating warmth coming from behind her. She experimented a little, edging softly closer to see how near she could get to that large heat without actually touching it. How warm grown-up people's bodies are!

The curtains rippled inward in the cool morning air. The light was very grey, not yellow as it ought to be on the morning of a picnic. Her clothes were on the floor beside the bed. Clothes look lonely with nobody in them. She watched herself in the glass, opening her mouth and holding up her hand to see the reflection do the same thing.

Then the clock downstairs struck seven, and she felt it safe to slip out. In the glass she saw the blankets open, a pair of legs grope outward. Cautiously, not to rouse Mother, she picked up her clothes and got to the door. As she turned the knob one shoe fell with a thump. She looked anxiously at the rounded hill. It stirred ominously, but said nothing.

Sylvia, with sheets and blankets trailing from her, lay like a bundle of laundry on the window seat. Janet woke her, they sat dressing and babbling together, now and then shouting along the passage to Rose, who slept with Nounou. Rose kept opening the nursery door to ask what they said, then, while the remark was being repeated, Nounou's voice would command her to shut it. Janet, with brown knees hunched under her chin, picked at shoelace knots. Sylvia, in her deliberate way, was planning this time to get her shirt on right side forward. She announced several times her intention of drinking plenty of ginger ale at the Picnic, because peanut butter sandwiches make you so thirsty. She kept saying this in the hope of learning, from Janet's comment, whether milk has to be drunk at Picnics. Janet did not contradict her, so Sylvia felt that the ginger ale was a probability.

Ruth, lying in a delicious morning drowse, rather enjoyed their clatter, as one does enjoy the responsibilities of others. Refreshed by long slumber, she relished the seven-o'clock-in-the-morning feeling of a house with children in it. A sharp rumour of bacon and coffee came tingling up the back stairs. She lazily reckoned the number of people who would be using the bathroom. It would be a good plan to get ahead of the traffic. But while she was trying to make the decision she heard the children hailing George. He said something about not leaning out of the windows without any clothes on. "We're trying to see if there are cobwebs on the lawn, when there's cobwebs it's not going to rain." Then his steps moved along the corridor. She relapsed into her warm soothing sprawl. Besides, it's always a nuisance to get down too early and have to wait about for breakfast. She liked to arrive just when the coffee was coming fresh onto the table.

She looked forward to an entertaining day. Nothing is more amusing than one's friends in the knot of absurd circumstance. She had been afraid of Joyce; but certainly last night the girl had made a fool of herself. And Phyllis, the cool and lovely Phyllis, usually so sure, she too would be on the defensive. The life of women like Ruth

sometimes appears a vast campaign of stealth. They move like Guy Fawkes conspirators in the undervaults of society, planting ineffective petards in one another's cellars.

She enjoyed herself trying to foresee what Phyllis's strategy would be. I think I'll take pains to be rather nice to Mr. Martin. In spite of his simplicity there's something dangerous about him. It would be fun to allay his suspicions and then, when she got him in clear profile against the sky, shoot him down without mercy. She felt an agreeable sensation of being on the strong side; of having underneath her the solid conventions and technicalities of life—as comfortable and reassuringly supportive as the warm bed itself. Not a very lucky analogy, perhaps: she looked over at Ben, who was still asleep on the floor. He looked pathetic beside the collapsed bed frames, his dejected feet protruding at the end of the mattress. But that was the satisfying thing about Ben: he was conquered and beaten. He would never surprise her with any wild folly. Urbane, docile, enduring, he knew his place. Properly wedged into his seat in the middle of the row, he would never trample on people's toes to reach the aisle between the acts. The great fife and drum corps might racket all around him, he would scarcely hear it.

There was cotton in his ears. Any resolute woman, she reflected sagely, even without children to help her, can drill a man into insensibility.

George allowed the bath water to splash noisily while he cleaned his teeth, but he always turned off the tap while shaving. He shaved by ear as much as by sight or touch. Unless he could hear the crackling stroke of the razor blade he was not satisfied that it was cutting properly.

"How soon do you think the Pony will come?" Janet had asked him as he came upstairs. The children had found some deceptive promotion scheme advertised in a cheap magazine of *Nou-nou's*. The notice had led them to believe that if they solved a very transparent puzzle they would easily win the First Prize, a Shetland pony. They had answered the puzzle and now were waiting daily to hear the patter of hoofs up the lane. To George's dismay he had found that they took this very seriously. They had swept out an old stall in the stable and ravished a blanket from Rose's bed to keep Prince (whose name and photograph had appeared in the advertisement) from being cold at night. He had tried, gently, to caution them, explaining that the original puzzle had only been preliminary lure for some subscription-getting

contest. Undismayed they had badgered Lizzie, the ice man, and a couple of neighbours into signing up at twenty-five cents each. They paid no heed to his temperate warnings that it would be impossible to get many subscriptions for so plebeian a journal. He wondered how he would ever be able to disillusion them.

The razor paused and he stared at his half-lathered face in the glass as he realized the nice parallel. Isn't it exactly what Nature is always doing to us? Promising us a Pony! The Pony of wealth, fame, satisfied desire, contentment, if we just sign on the dotted line. . . . Obey that Impulse. By Heaven, what a Promotion Scheme she has, the old jade! Had his sorry dreams been any wiser than those of Janet and Sylvia? His absurd vision of being an artist in living, of knowing the glamour and passion of some generous fruitful career, of piercing into the stormy darkness that lies beyond the pebbly shallows of to-day — all risible! Life is defeat. Hide, hide the things you know to be true. Fall back into the genial humdrum. Fill yourself with sleep. It's all a Promotion Scheme. . . . And inside these wary counsels something central and unarguable was crying: It wasn't just a Pony. It was the horse with wings.

The great Promotion Scheme, the crude and adorable artifice! How many infatuated subscribers it has lured in, even persuaded them to renew after they had found the magazine rather dull reading. In the course of another million years would it still be the same, man and woman consoling and thwarting one another in their study of the careless hints of Law? He could see the full stream of life, two interwoven and struggling currents endlessly mocking and yearning to one another, hungry and afraid. Clear and lucent in sunlit reaches, troubled and swift over stony stairs, coiled together in dreaming eddies, swinging apart in frills of foam. Sweet immortal current, down and down to the unknown sea. Who has not thrilled to it, craved it, cursed it, invented religions out of it, made it fetich or taboo, seen in its pure crystal the mirror of his own austere or swinish face. Turn from it in horror, or muddy it with heavy feet, this cruel water is troubled by angels and mirrors the blind face of God. Blessings on those who never knew it, children and happy ghosts.

George ran his fingers over his glossy chin. He looked solemn recognition at the queer fellow in the glass, and mused that it's only people who haven't had something they wanted who take the trouble

to think confused and beautiful thoughts. But he heard a cautious hand trying the knob. Even thinking about God is no excuse for keeping others out of the bathroom. He laughed aloud, a peal of perfect self-mockery, and splashed hastily into the cold water. Martin, waiting to get in, heard him and wondered. Usually it is only gods or devils who are merry by themselves. Among human beings it takes two to make a laugh.

"Why were you laughing?" he asked, opening his door when he heard George leave the bathroom.

George paid no attention. He was hurrying to tell Phyllis his thoughts before they escaped. Who but she would have endured his absurdities? If she had had hallucinations of her own, that only brought them closer together. Out of these ashes they could rebuild their truth. Love means nothing until you fall into it all over again.

She was sitting on the edge of the bed, by the window, nervously picking the nails of one hand with the forefinger of the other. This habit, which he detested, almost broke his enthusiasm. He had a grotesque desire to tell her that he would forgive her even that. I guess I really do love her enormously, he thought, or the little things she does wouldn't madden me so. Exasperated with sudden tenderness, he had somehow expected her to

meet him with equal affection. But she just sat there, looking down at her hands. He took them, to stop the hated gesture. The bantam over the hill repeated his rollicking sharp salute, which would have been an epigram if he had uttered it only once.

"I wish you could stop that rooster," she said. "Over and over again, the same identical squawk. I wouldn't mind so much if he wasn't a bantam. It makes it seem so silly, somehow. He goes out under those great tall pine trees and shouts at them."

He smiled and turned her face toward him. She looked pitifully tired. He knew how she would look when she was old.

"Perhaps he's rather like me," he said.

"There was one here that crowed just like that when we were children. The same note exactly."

"It's heredity. Probably this is his great-great-great-grand-egg."

She reached under the pillow, pulled out the little flattened handkerchief, and stood up.

"I must hurry. I'd give anything if to-day were over. I suppose life is like this, just day after day."

"Give me that," he said, taking the handkerchief. "I've seen it before."

"No, you haven't," she said, still in the same Jull tone. "It's a new one."

"Yes, I have. Last night."

"Last night?"

"Yes, under your pillow."

"You?"

She stared, her face quivering. Suddenly the line of her mouth seemed to collapse and run downward. Something tight had broken, something proud and fierce had bent. She was crying.

"Oh, Geordie, life is so much queerer than I ever knew. Why didn't you tell me? I had such beastly dreams. I wish I could die."

The old name recalled one of his own for her.

"Leopard, Leopard . . . you silly little half-tamed leopard. What do I care about your dreams? It'll all be all right in the morning."

"It *is* the morning, and it isn't all right. *You* take them for the Picnic, let me stay at home. I *won't* see Mr. Martin. Take him away. He's so like *you*, Geordie, but with all your beastliness left out. Your *nice* beastliness, your *dear* beastliness, everything that makes me hate and adore you."

"Now, listen. I've got a great idea. I didn't half take my bath, I was so keen to tell it to you. Let's get married."

She looked at him in such quaint misery, her

face all wrinkled and slippery with tears, he was almost angry again.

"Damn it, I mean *really* married. The first time doesn't count, it's only a Promotion Scheme, your genial old prayer book admits it. But the Bible says it's better to marry than to burn, doesn't it?"

"Let's do both."

(Why, he thought, she's got almost as much sense as Joyce.)

"That's the way to talk," he said. "Because I'd much rather marry a woman with a sense of humour. All right, we'll pretend we've been living in sin, and now I'm going to make an honest woman of you. Wilt thou, Phyllis, have this man to thy wedded husband——"

"We *have* been living in sin. It's sin to be unhappy and hateful."

"Of course it is. And if either of you know any impediment — Where's that prayer book of yours? I love that marriage-service stuff so much, it'd be worth while to get spliced every now and then just to hear it. It's so gorgeously earthy. Remember that bit where as soon as he's tied 'em up the parson has misgivings, and sings out in alarm 'O Lord, save thy servant and thy handmaid!'"

"No, don't read me the prayer book now, I can't stand it. I want to get my bath."

"Run along then." He threw her blue robe around her shoulders. "We've got to go through with the Picnic, for the children's sake. We'll make it the happiest day in the world."

"You don't think it's too late?"

He watched her down the passage, and then stood by the window seat looking out. The morning was very moist, there was fog over the bay, the hall had a faint musty odour like damp wallpaper. Certainly it was going to rain. Never mind, it would be one of those steady drumming rains that make a house so cosy. He was surprised to see that Joyce was in the garden already, she had set up her easel near the tea table and was painting. No, he thought, I shan't let her go: we *can* all be happy together. If Phyl knew how much she owes to Joyce she'd fall at her feet. How wise women would be if they knew that a man who has only loved one has never loved any. But better not mention it. Who wants them to be wise, poor . . . half-tamed leopards!

"There's someone in the bathroom," Phyllis said, coming back.

"Martin, probably."

"No, it's Ruth. I can smell her all down the

passage. That mignonette she uses. Funny how sharp one's nose is in damp weather."

"If we ever come here again we'll have the house repapered."

She knelt on the seat beside him.

"Don't let's come again."

Her look followed his into the quiet garden. Both were silent. George guessed well enough why Joyce was there. She was doing a sketch for him, something to leave him. In that little figure at the easel was all the honour and disaster of all the world.

Side by side, his arm about her, he and Phyllis looked down into the cool green refreshment of birdsong and dew. The light was filled with a sense of mist, too thin to be seen, but sunshine was incapable behind it. Filmy air globed them in, as the glimmering soap-bubble spheres a breath of the soap's perfume. A dream, a fog stained with dim colour, a bubble of glamour, farce, and despair; all the sane comfortable words are no more than wind. One gush of violets rebuts them. Life is too great for those who live it. Purposely they wound and mar it, to bring it to their own tragic dimension. What was Joyce's word? . . . Inadequate. Yes, not all the beauty of the world

can allay the bitter disproportion. And Time will come to rob us even of this precious grievance, this pang we carry in our dusty knapsack like the marshal's silver baton. And Time will come and take my lust away. . . .

So learn to live on farce. To savour its venom, like the Eastern King, dose and larger dose, until one can relish and thrive on a diet of acid that would blast the normal heart. Isn't it this very disproportion that makes the glory? There would be no laughter in a perfect world. Ever after, digesting his secret poison, he would search other faces too for the sign of that healing bane.

He felt that Phyllis was about to say something. He erased his mind, to be ready to receive her thought; as one parent holds out arms to take the baby from the other.

"I think she's rather wonderful. I think I could . . ."

Joy and clean gusto, the blessed hilarity of living! Why, it was so divinely simple, if Phyl would care to understand. . . .

"Dearest, if you . . . if you only . . ."

The half-tamed leopard stirred and showed a yellow spark. George's mind, uneasily changing itself, made swift cusping arcs like the tracks of a

turning car. Ruth came rustling from the bathroom. She was amazed to see them doing a fox-trot together.

"Good-morning!" he said. "Perhaps you didn't know, this is our wedding day."

"Hurry up," he whispered to Phyllis. "Grab the bath while you can. I'll get dressed, I'll just have time to mend that railing before breakfast."

## XXI

**J**OYCE had slipped out early. There was something unbearable in the house's morning stir, its sense of preparation for living in which she would have no part.

Under the pine trees she was far enough from the house to consider it as a whole. She studied its weatherbeaten secrecy. She had the anxious apprehension of the artist, who needs to *feel* his subject, purge it of mere reality, before he can begin work. The long line of the roof sagged a little, like an animal inured to carry burdens. The two semicircled bays, flanking the veranda, kept the garden under scrutiny. Each of all those windows had its own outlook on life. A thread of smoke stole from the kitchen chimney, sifting into the hazy morning. Imperceptible greyness was in the nebulous light, filtered through a gauze of ocean fog. The house was waiting, waiting. That vapoury air dimmed the bright world like breath on a mirror. Yet, for her mood, it was somehow right. A morning of fire and blue would have been indecent.

Houses, built for rest and safety, and then filled with the tension of such trivial sufferings. I wonder if any one has ever done a true portrait of a house? The opaque pearly light now seemed to her more sincere than any glamour of sun or moon. But how reluctant it was to surrender its meaning. She could hear the excited voices of the children, calling to and fro. Her mind was still pursuing something, she didn't know just what. It was like trying to think of a forgotten word. The house hasn't yet quite got over being empty so long, she thought. It's still a little bit empty. Or it believed that being lived in again would be such fun, and now it's disappointed. It had forgotten that life is like this.

She began to paint. This picture was for George, to remind him of things he did not know he knew. It must have love in it, and something more, too. The name of this picture, she said to herself, is *A Portrait of a House Saying Good-bye*.

The shading was very odd along the veranda, between the two turreted bays and beneath the overhang of the sleeping porch. The light came from no direction, it was latent and diffused, softened in slopes and patches among many angles. She had already dabbed in the profile of the building when she realized what it was that she wanted.

It was not the outside of the house but an interior that was forming in her mind. She left the outline tentative, as it was, and imagined the side of the house to be transparent. Under the sharp projection of the balcony her brush struck through the glassed veranda and found itself in the dining room. The tinted panes gave her a clean spot of colour to focus on. Below these the room was obscure, but then the brush had discovered a pool of candlelight to dip in. Shadowy figures were sitting there, but just as she was about to sketch them they seemed to dissolve from their chairs and run toward the windows, looking outward furtively. There was another, too, outside the little sitting room, whispering in a dapple of black and silver chiaroscuro. Oh, if I could only catch what this means. If someone could help me. If George were here to help me. His large patience, his dear considering voice with the wandering parentheses of thought that she had so often mocked and loved. Voice so near her now and soon so impossible to hear. No one would help her. No one can ever help the artist. Others she saves, herself she cannot save. . . .

She had saved him. She had saved Phyllis's George, given Phyllis the greatest gift of all. Given her back those Georges, enriched with

understanding and fear. But could she save her own poor phantom, or even herself? At any rate she was going back to her own life. She thought of that adored city waiting for her, its steep geometries of building, its thousand glimpses that inflame the artist's eye. Extraordinary: you'd expect to find a painter exultantly at work on every street corner; and how rarely you see 'em!—The correct miseries of polite departure, a few gruesome hours in the train (ripping out the stitches of her golden fancy) and she would be there. There, where the whole vast miracle seemed, in moments of ecstasy, to have been planned for her special amazement and pleasure. The subway, with rows of shrewd and weary faces; girls with their short skirts and vivid scarves; men with shaven, sharply modelled mouths . . . the endless beauty of people, and their blessed insensibility to the infernal pang. . . . Yes, that was what Phyllis could do for him better than she: dull and deaden that nerve in his mind: chloroform George the Fourth, the poor little bastard!

She was going back to her own life. Back to the civilized pains of art: its nostalgia for lost simplicity, its full and generous tolerance, its self-studious doubt, its divinely useless mirth, its dis-

regard of things not worth discussing among the cheerfully disenchanted. Ah, never try to explain things you know are true. As soon as you begin to do that, they seem doubtful.

A darkness kept coming into the picture. It was as though the silence that had been stored up in that house was now draining out of it, seeping into the absorbent air. The fog was thickening and distorted perspectives. The house was out of drawing. That tricky shadow under the balcony was baffling: it made the whole porch seem out of plumb. Holding up a brush to get a true horizontal, she saw that Martin was coming across the lawn.

"Why, it's Bunny!" he said, pointing to the figure she had suggested with a few hasty strokes. "I know now why she wanted you to help me."

Joyce did not look up.

"You must go, at once," she said.

"I was lying in bed, waiting for it to be time to get up. I saw that some of the wallpaper, by the window, was torn. When I looked at it I found the mouse pattern underneath. It's the old nursery."

"That's what Bunny meant! Go and look in the cupboard, see if you can find it, the mouse I gave you. That's your only chance."

"I think I understand now."

"You mean, you know that we're the same——"

"Yes, that this is what we're all coming to. Except Bunny . . . and—and you. *You* haven't done it, not quite. . . ."

"Martin, I'm worst of all," she cried. "I'm neither one nor the other."

"No, I think Ben is the worst," he said slowly. "It's too bad; he was such a nice boy. Of course George is pretty awful, but I didn't know him before."

"Quick, go away. Don't try to learn too much. You must go for *their* sake. If they find out who you are——"

She had a sick presentiment that they must hurry. And still he lingered, and she could feel Time sloping toward some bottomless plunge.

"Perhaps I don't want to go. There's something I don't quite understand. You all look at each other so queerly: look, and then turn away. And you and George in the garden. What is it? What's happened that hurts you all so?"

How could she answer? How tell him that the world is often too fierce for its poor creatures, overstrains and soils them in their most secret nerves; and that with all their horrors they would not have it otherwise. He had come like the unspoiled essence of living, groping blindly for what

it divines to be happy and real and true; he was thwarted and damned by the murderous pettiness of his own scarred brethren. If I had two friends called Food and Hunger, I'd never introduce them to each other. Must she, who was born to love him, be the one to tell him this?

"You *must* go. Don't you see, it isn't only us. It's you too. You and George. . . . Oh, I tried not to tell you. George is just you grown up."

He looked at her, appalled.

"You're the George that was once. That's why he hates you so.—You're George the Fifth, I suppose," she said, forgetting he wouldn't understand.

"I *won't* be like George!" he exclaimed. "But I shan't go unless you'll come with me. It wouldn't be any fun unless you were there. Help us to get away, and we'll never come again."

She did not tell him that she could never go back; that he must go alone; that they would always be lonely.

"Are you *sure*?" he asked pitifully. "Have I got to be like *that*? Like George, I mean?"

"Hurry, hurry," was all she could say.

He was running toward the house.

She tried to follow, but some sluggish seizure was about her limbs. The house, shadowy in

deepening mist, loomed over her. She seemed to hear its passages patter with racing feet. There was a face at the pantry window. Perhaps there was a face at every window. There always is. She dared not look.

There *were* racing feet. The three children burst onto the porch above her.

"Time for breakfast!" they called. "And then we'll be ready for the Picnic!"

Now she knew. The whole dumb face of the house had been warning her; George's premonition last night was the same. She tried wildly to wave them back, but her voice was sealed. Frolicking with anticipation, Janet and Sylvia and Rose ran to the railing and leaned over to shout to her.

"See if there are any cobwebs! If there are, it's not going to rain."

Time swayed over her like an impending tree, tremulous, almost cut through. It seemed so gingerly poised that perhaps the mere fury of her will could hold it stable for a moment. Where was Martin? Oh, if he found the mouse in time he would get back before this happened and perhaps his memory would be wiped clean. She saw George appear at the door of the porch with tools in his hands, and his face turn ghastly.

"We're going to have ginger ale at the Picnic," Sylvia was calling.

She tried to hold Time still with her mind. She was frantically motioning the children back, crying out and wondering whether her voice made any sound. The balustrade was going, she saw the old splintery wood cracking, swaying, sagging. There was a snapping crash of breaking posts. The children's faces, flushed with gaiety, their mouths open, suddenly changed. They leaned forward and still farther forward, holding out their arms to her as though for an embrace. They were beginning to fall. After so many little tears and troubles, how could they know that this was more than one last strange tenderness. And as the railing shattered and they fell, she saw that Martin was at the door of the porch. He had found it.

THE candles were still smoking on the cake, the children all trooping toward the hall. "Wait, wait!" he cried. "Come back a minute!"

They turned in surprise. The Grown-Ups, very large in the doorway, looked like gigantic prison guards faced by some sudden unexpected insurrection. One of them brushed against the bronze gongs hanging at one side of the door. They jangled softly as if calling them all to attention.

"Don't let's play that game," he said breathlessly. "It's too terrible."

"What game?" asked Mrs. Richmond.

"We made up a game. A game of spies, to——" He realized that he couldn't possibly explain with the Parents standing there. He caught Joyce's eye. She looked frightened.

"Why, Martin, how silly you are," chirped Phyllis. "Of course we weren't going to play it, not really."

"He's not silly!" Joyce shouted fiercely. "I was going to play it."

"So was I," Bunny flashed. "Phyllis is telling fibs. We *were* going to play it. We were going to spy on Grown-Ups, to find out whether they have a good time."

"Bunny, Bunny," said her mother reprovingly. "Tell Phyllis you're sorry. You mustn't forget she's a guest."

"Don't mention it," said Phyllis primly. "When I grow up I'm going to have a lot of children and teach them lovely manners."

"When *I* grow up," Bunny exclaimed, "my children won't never have to say Thank you or they're sorry unless they really mean it."

"When *I* grow up," Ruth said, "I'm going to do without children. They're too much of a burden."

"Perhaps when the time comes," said one of the guards, "they'll find it's not as easy as it sounds."

Martin turned hopelessly to the boys. "Ben, don't *you* grow up. It isn't fun. Ben, I—I *advise* you not to grow up."

"Quit your kidding," Ben retorted. "What's biting you?"

"*Ben!*" exclaimed an indignant parent. "Where on earth do you pick up that way of talking. I'm amazed at you."

Martin saw it was too late. Already something

had happened. Just the invasion of elders into the room had changed them all.

"Mother!" he appealed. "Tell the truth, it's awfully important, cross your heart and hope to die. *Do you have a good time?*"

A chorus of laughter from the adults.

"Why, dear, what an absurd question. Do we look so miserable?"

"They won't tell us," he cried bitterly. "They're all liars!"

There was an appalled silence.

"It's time to get them home. Parties always upset them. Ben, stop biting your nails."

"Joyce, what on earth are you snivelling about? Really, it seems as though the more you do for them the less they appreciate it."

The rain had thinned to a drizzle. Martin stood uneasily in the hall while the others collected umbrellas and rubbers and repeated their curtsies. The house smelt of raincoats and fresh wallpaper.

"Martin, what *is* it? Don't you see I'm busy talking to Mrs. Clyde? What do you keep twitching my arm for?"

He had only wanted to ask her if they could invite Joyce to stay to supper. But he couldn't shout it out before everyone.

"Well, then, if you didn't want anything special, why are you bothering me? Go and say good-bye to Joyce. Say it politely, and tell her you hope she'll come again. And after that your father wants to speak to you."

But Joyce had already gone, and when she looked back, to try to show him she understood, she did not see him. His father was asking him if a boy ten years old didn't know better than to insult his parents like that.



## THE ROCKING HORSE



AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED  
TO  
TOM DALY



## A GRACE BEFORE WRITING

This is a sacrament, I think!

Holding the bottle toward the light,  
As blue as lupin gleams the ink:

May Truth be with me as I write!

That small dark cistern may afford

Reunion with some vanished friend,—  
And with this ink I have just poured

May none but honest words be penned!



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## THE ROCKING HORSE

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### THE TRYST

**A**CCORDING to tradition  
The place where sweethearts meet  
Is meadowland and hillside,  
And not the city street.  
Love lingers when you say it  
By lake and moonlight glow:  
The poets all O. K. it—  
It may be better so!

And yet I keep my trysting  
In the department stores:  
I always wait for Emma  
At the revolving doors.  
It might dismay the poets,  
And yet it's wholly true—  
My heart leaps when I know it's  
My Emma, pushing through!

It may be more romantic  
By brook or waterfall,

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## THE ROCKING HORSE

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### THE TRYST—(continued)

Yet better meet on pavements  
Than never meet at all:  
I want no moon beguiling,  
No dark and bouldered shore,  
When I see Emma smiling  
And twirling through the door!

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IN THE CITY

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FROM AN OFFICE WINDOW

*(Madison Square, New York City)*

WHO knows the heart's most secret aisle  
Where Beauty her strange message brings?  
She turns our eyes from desk and file  
To gaze on new-revealèd things.

In unsuspected place and time  
Her mystic profile shakes and thrills;  
The humblest hear her great bells chime  
Grey streets are lit with daffodils!

Who knows what sudden bliss and awe,  
What comfort, and what courage new,  
Some typist gained when first she saw  
Diana, poised against the blue!

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## THE ROCKING HORSE

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### THE FAT LITTLE PURSE

ON Saturdays, after the baby  
Is bathed, fed, and sleeping serene,  
His mother, as quickly as may be,  
Arranges the household routine.  
She rapidly makes herself pretty  
And leaves the young limb with his nurse,  
Then gaily she starts for the city,  
And with her the fat little purse.

She trips through the crowd at the station,  
To the rendezvous spot where we meet,  
And keeping her eyes from temptation,  
She avoids the most windowy street!  
She is off for the Weekly Adventure;  
To her comrade for better and worse  
She says, "Never mind, when you've spent  
your  
Last bit, here's the fat little purse."

Apart, in her thrifty exchequer,  
She has hidden what must not be spent:  
Enough for the butcher and baker,  
Katie's wages, and milkman, and rent;  
—20—

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## IN THE CITY

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### THE FAT LITTLE PURSE—(continued)

But the rest of her brave little treasure  
She is gleeful and prompt to disburse—  
What a richness of innocent pleasure  
Can come from her fat little purse!

But either by giving or buying,  
The little purse does not stay fat—  
Perhaps it's a ragged child crying,  
Perhaps it's a "pert little hat."  
And the bonny brown eyes that were brightened  
By pleasures so quaint and diverse,  
Look up at me, wistful and frightened,  
To see such a thin little purse.

The wisest of all financiering  
Is that which is done by our wives:  
By some little known profiteering  
They add twos and twos and make fives;  
And, husband, if you would be learning  
The secret of thrift, it is terse:  
Invest the great part of your earning  
In her little, fat little purse.

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## THE ROCKING HORSE

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### THE REFLECTION

I HAVE not heard her voice, nor seen her face,  
Nor touched her hand;  
And yet some echo of her woman's grace  
I understand.

I have no picture of her loveliness,  
Her smile, her tint;  
But that she is both beautiful and good  
I have true hint.

In all that my friend thinks and says, I see  
Her mirror true;  
His thought of her is gentle; she must be  
All gentle too.

In all his grief or laughter, work or play,  
Each mood and whim,  
How brave and tender, day by common day,  
She speaks through him!

Therefore I say I know her, be her face  
Or dark or fair—  
For when he shows his heart's most secret place  
I see her there!

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## IN THE CITY

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### TO A POST-OFFICE INKWELL

**H**OW many humble hearts have dipped  
In you, and scrawled their manuscript!  
Have shared their secrets, told their cares,  
Their curious and quaint affairs!

Your pool of ink, your scratchy pen,  
Have moved the lives of unborn men,  
And watched young people, breathing hard,  
Put Heaven on a postal card.

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## THE ROCKING HORSE

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### THE BALLOON PEDDLER

WHO is the man on Chestnut street  
With coloured toy balloons?  
I see him with his airy freight  
On sunny afternoons—  
A peddler of such lovely goods!  
The heart leaps to behold  
His mass of bubbles, red and green  
And blue and pink and gold.

For sure that noble peddler man  
Hath antic merchandise:  
His toys that float and swim in air  
Attract my eager eyes.  
Perhaps he is a changeling prince  
Bewitched through magic moons  
To tempt us solemn busy folk  
With meaningless balloons.

Beware, oh, valiant merchantman,  
Tread cautious on the pave!  
Lest some day come some realist,  
Some haggard soul and grave,  
A puritan efficientist  
Who deems thy toys a sin—  
He'll stalk thee madly from behind  
And prick them with a pin!

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## IN THE CITY

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### THE TELEPHONE DIRECTORY

**N**O MALORY of old romance,  
No Crusoe tale, it seems to me,  
Can equal in rich circumstance  
This telephone directory.

No ballad of fair ladies' eyes,  
No legend of proud knights and dames,  
Can fill me with such bright surmise  
As this great book of numbered names!

How many hearts and lives unknown,  
Rare damsels pining for a squire,  
Are waiting for the telephone  
To ring, and call them to the wire.

Some wait to hear a loved voice say  
The news they will rejoice to know  
At Rome 2637 J  
Or Marathon 1450!

And some, perhaps, are stung with fear  
And answer with reluctant tread:  
The message they expect to hear  
Means life or death or daily bread.

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## THE ROCKING HORSE

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### THE TELEPHONE DIRECTORY—(continued)

A million hearts here wait our call,  
All naked to our distant speech—  
I wish that I could ring them all  
And have some welcome news for each!

THE ICE WAGON

I'D like to split the sky that roofs us down,  
Break through the crystal lid of upper air,  
And tap the cool still reservoirs of heaven.  
I'd empty all those unseen lakes of freshness  
Down some vast funnel, through our stifled streets.

I'd like to pump away the grit, the dust,  
Raw dazzle of the sun on garbage piles,  
The droning troops of flies, sharp bitter smells,  
And gush that bright sweet flood of unused air  
Down every alley where the children gasp.

And then I'd take a fleet of ice wagons—  
Big yellow creaking carts, drawn by wet horses,—  
And drive them rumbling through the blazing slums.  
In every wagon would be blocks of coldness,  
Pale, gleaming cubes of ice, all green and silver,  
With inner veins and patterns, white and frosty;  
Great lumps of chill would drip and steam and  
shimmer,  
And spark like rainbows in their little fractures.

And where my wagons stood there would be puddles,  
A wetness and a sparkle and a coolness.

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## THE ROCKING HORSE

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### THE ICE WAGON—(continued)

My friends and I would chop and splinter open  
The blocks of ice. Bare feet would soon come pat-  
tering,

And some would wrap it up in Sunday papers,  
And some would stagger home with it in baskets,  
And some would be too gay for aught but sucking,  
Licking, crunching those fast melting pebbles,  
Gulping as they slipped down unexpected—  
Laughing to perceive that secret numbness  
Amid their small hot persons!

At every stop would be at least one urchin  
Would take a piece to cool the sweating horses  
And hold it up against their silky noses—  
And they would start, and then decide they liked it.

Down all the sun-cursed byways of the town  
Our wagons would be trailed by grimy tots,  
Their ragged shirts half off them with excitement!  
Dabbling toes and fingers in our leakage,  
A lucky few up sitting with the driver,  
All clambering and stretching grey-pink palms.

And by the time the wagons were all empty  
Our arms and shoulders would be lame with chopping,  
Our backs and thighs pain-shot, our fingers frozen.  
But how we would recall those eager faces,  
Red thirsty tongues with ice-chips sliding on them,

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IN THE CITY

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THE ICE WAGON—(continued)

The pinched white cheeks, and their pathetic gladness.

Then we would know that arms were made for aching—

I wish to God that I could go to-morrow!

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## THE ROCKING HORSE

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### AT A MOVIE THEATRE

HOW well he spoke who coined the phrase  
    *The picture palace!* Aye, in sooth  
A palace, where men's weary days  
    Are crowned with kingliness of youth.

Strange palace! Crowded, airless, dim,  
    Where toes are trod and strained eyes smart,  
We watch a wand of brightness limn  
    The old heroics of the heart.

Romance again hath us in thrall  
    And Love is sweet and always true,  
And in the darkness of the hall  
    Hands clasp—as they were meant to do.

Remote from peevish joys and ills  
    Our souls, *pro tem*, are purged and free:  
We see the sun on western hills,  
    The crumbling tumult of the sea.

We are the blond that maidens crave,  
    Well balanced at a dozen banks;  
By sleight of hand we haste to save  
    A brown-eyed life, nor stay for thanks!

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IN THE CITY

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AT A MOVIE THEATRE---(continued)

Alas, perhaps our instinct feels  
Life is not all it might have been,  
So we applaud fantastic reels  
Of shadow, cast upon a screen!

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## THE ROCKING HORSE

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### SONNETS IN A LODGING HOUSE

#### I

**E**ACH morn she crackles upward, tread by tread,  
All apprehensive of some hideous sight:  
Perhaps the Fourth Floor Back, who reads in bed,  
Forgot his gas and let it burn all night—  
The Sweet Young Thing who has the middle room,  
She much suspects: for once some ink was spilled,  
And then the plumber, in an hour of gloom,  
Found all the bathroom pipes with tea-leaves filled.

No League of Nations scheme can make her gay—  
She knows the rank duplicity of man;  
Some folks expect clean towels every day,  
They'll get away with murder if they can!  
She tacks a card (alas, few roomers mind it)  
*Please leave the tub as you would wish to find it!*

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## IN THE CITY

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### SONNETS IN A LODGING HOUSE—(continued)

#### II

Men lodgers are the best, the Mrs. said:  
They don't use my gas jets to fry sardines,  
They don't leave red-hot irons on the spread,  
They're out all morning, when a body cleans.  
A man ain't so secretive, never cares  
What kind of private papers he leaves lay,  
So I can get a line on his affairs  
And dope out whether he is likely pay.  
But women! Say, they surely get my bug!  
They stop their keyholes up with chewing gum,  
Spill grease, and hide the damage with the rug,  
And fry marshmallows when their callers come.  
They always are behindhand with their rents—  
Take my advice and let your rooms to gents!

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## THE ROCKING HORSE

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### DO YOU EVER FEEL LIKE GOD?

**A** CROSS the court there rises the back wall  
Of the Magna Carta Apartments.  
The other evening the people in the apartment opposite  
Had forgotten to draw their curtains.  
I could see them dining: the well-blanchèd cloth,  
The silver and glass, the crystal water jug,  
The meat and vegetables; and their clean pink hands  
Outstretched in busy gesture.

It was pleasant to watch them, they were so human;  
So gay, innocent, unconscious of scrutiny.  
They were four: an elderly couple,  
A young man, and a girl—with lovely shoulders  
Mellow in the glow of the lamp.  
They were sitting over coffee, and I could see their  
hands talking.

At last the older two left the room.  
The boy and girl looked at each other. . . .  
Like a flash, they leaned and kissed.

Good old human race that keeps on multiplying!  
A little later I went down the street to the movies,

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IN THE CITY

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DO YOU EVER FEEL LIKE GOD?—(continued)

And there I saw all four, laughing and joking together.

And as I watched them I felt like God—  
Benevolent, all-knowing, and tender.

THE MAN WITH THE HOE (PRESS)

**A**BOUT these roaring cylinders  
Where leaping words and paper mate,  
A sudden glory moves and stirs—  
An inky cataract in spate!

What voice for falsehood or for truth,  
What hearts attentive to be stirred—  
How dimly understood, in sooth,  
The power of the printed word!

These flashing webs and cogs of steel  
Have shaken empires, routed kings,  
Yet never turn too fast to feel  
The tragedies of humble things.

O words, be strict in honesty,  
Be just and simple and serene;  
O rhymes, sing true, or you will be  
Unworthy of this great machine!

GREEN ESCAPE

**A**T three o'clock in the afternoon  
On a hot September day,  
I began to dream of a highland stream  
And a frostbit russet tree;  
Of the swashing dip of a clipper ship  
(White canvas wet with spray)  
And the swirling green and milk-foam clean  
Along her canted lee.

I heard the quick staccato click  
Of the typist's pounding keys,  
And I had to brood of a wind more rude  
Than that by a motor fanned—  
And I lay inert in a flannel shirt  
To watch the rhyming seas  
Deploy and fall in a silver sprawl  
On a beach of sun-blached sand.

There is no desk shall tame my lust  
For hills and windy skies;  
My secret hope of the sea's blue slope  
No clerkly task shall dull;  
And though I print no echoed hint  
Of adventures I devise,

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## THE ROCKING HORSE

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### GREEN ESCAPE—(continued)

My eyes still pine for the comely line  
Of an outbound vessel's hull.

When I elope with an autumn day  
And make my green escape,  
I'll leave my pen to tamer men  
Who have more docile souls;  
For forest aisles and office files  
Have a very different shape,  
And it's hard to woo the ocean blue  
In a row of pigeon holes!

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## IN THE CITY

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### VESPER SONG FOR COMMUTERS

*(Instead of "Marathon," the commuter may substitute the name of his favorite suburb)*

THE stars are kind to Marathon,  
How low, how close, they lean!  
They jostle one another  
And do their best to please—  
Indeed, they are so neighbourly  
That in the twilight green  
One reaches out to pick them  
Behind the poplar trees.

The stars are kind to Marathon,  
And one particular  
Bright planet (which is Vesper)  
Most lucid and serene,  
Is waiting by the railway bridge,  
The Good Commuter's Star,  
The Star of Wise Men coming home  
On time, at 6:15!



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## AT HOME

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## AT HOME

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### THE SECRET

**I**T was the House of Quietness  
To which I came at dusk;  
The garth was lit with roses  
And heavy with their musk.

The tremulous tall poplar trees  
Stood whispering around,  
The gentle flicker of their plumes  
More quiet than no sound.

And as I wondered at the door  
What magic might be there,  
The Lady of Sweet Silences  
Came softly down the stair.

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## THE ROCKING HORSE

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### DEDICATION FOR A FIREPLACE

**T**HIS hearth was built for thy delight,  
For thee the logs were sawn,  
For thee the largest chair, at night,  
Is to the chimney drawn.

For thee, dear lass, the match was lit  
To yield the ruddy blaze—  
May Jack Frost give us joy of it  
For many, many days.

ON NAMING A HOUSE

**W**HEN I a householder became  
I had to give my house a name.

I thought I'd call it "Poplar Trees,"  
Or "Widdershins" or "Velvet Bees,"  
Or "Just Beneath a Star."  
I thought of "House Where Plumbings  
Freeze,"  
Or "As You Like It," "If You Please,"  
Or "Nicotine" or "Bread and Cheese,"  
"Full Moon" or "Doors Ajar."

But still I sought some subtle charm,  
Some rune to guard my roof from harm  
And keep the devil far;  
I thought of this, and I was saved!  
I had my letter-heads engraved  
**The House Where Brown Eyes Are.**

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## THE ROCKING HORSE

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### REFUSING YOU IMMORTALITY

**I**F I should tell, unstinted,  
Your beauty and your grace,  
All future lads would whisper  
Traditions of your face;  
If I made public tumult  
Your mirth, your queenly state,  
Posterity would grumble  
That it was born too late.

I will not frame your beauty  
In bright undying phrase,  
Nor blaze it as a legend  
For unborn men to praise—  
For why should future lovers  
Be saddened and depressed?  
Deluded, let them fancy  
Their own girls loveliest!

LINES FOR AN ECCENTRIC'S  
BOOK PLATE

**T**O use my books all friends are bid:  
My shelves are open for 'em;  
And in each one, as Grolier did,  
I write *Et Amicorum*.

All lovely things in truth belong  
To him who best employs them;  
The house, the picture and the song,  
Are his who most enjoys them.

Perhaps this book holds precious lore,  
And you may best discern it.  
If you appreciate it more  
Than I—why don't return it!

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## THE ROCKING HORSE

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### THE CRIB

**I** SOUGHT immortality  
Here and there—  
I sent my rockets  
Into the air:  
I gave my name  
A hostage to ink;  
I dined a critic  
And bought him drink.

I spurned the weariness  
Of the flesh;  
Denied fatigue  
And began afresh—  
If men knew all,  
How they would laugh!  
I even planned  
My epitaph. . . .

And then one night  
When the dusk was thin  
I heard the nursery  
Rites begin:  
I heard the tender  
Soothings said

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AT HOME

---

THE CRIB—(continued)

Over a crib, and  
A small sweet head.

Then in a flash  
It came to me  
That there was my  
Immortality!

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## THE ROCKING HORSE

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### THE POET

**T**HE barren music of a word or phrase,  
The futile arts of syllable and stress,  
He sought. The poetry of common days  
He did not guess.

The simplest, sweetest rhythms life affords—  
Unselfish love, true effort truly done,  
The tender themes that underlie all words—  
He knew not one.

The human cadence and the subtle chime  
Of little laughters, home and child and wife,  
He knew not. Artist merely in his rhyme,  
Not in his life.

TO A DISCARDED MIRROR

DEAR glass, before your silver pane  
My lady used to tend her hair;  
And yet I search your disc in vain  
To find some shadow of her there.

I thought your magic, deep and bright,  
Might still some dear reflection hold:  
Some glint of eyes or shoulders white,  
Some flash of gowns she wore of old.

Your polished round must still recall  
The laughing face, the neck like snow—  
Remember, on your lonely wall,  
That Helen used you long ago!

---

## THE ROCKING HORSE

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### TO A VERY YOUNG GENTLEMAN

**M**Y child, what painful vistas are before you!  
What years of youthful ills and pangs and  
bumps—

Indignities from aunts who “just adore” you,  
And chicken-pox and measles, croup and mumps!  
I don’t wish to dismay you,—it’s not fair to,  
Promoted now from bassinet to crib,—  
But, O my babe, what troubles flesh is heir to  
Since God first made so free with Adam’s rib!

Laboriously you will proceed with teething;  
When teeth are here, you’ll meet the dentist’s  
chair;  
They’ll teach you ways of walking, eating, breath-  
ing,  
That stoves are hot, and how to brush your hair;  
And so, my poor, undaunted little stripling,  
By bruises, tears, and trousers you will grow,  
And, borrowing a leaf from Mr. Kipling,  
I’ll wish you luck, and moralise you so:

If you can think up seven thousand methods  
Of giving cooks and parents heart disease;  
Can rifle pantry-shelves, and then give death odds  
By water, fire, and falling out of trees;

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AT HOME

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TO A VERY YOUNG GENTLEMAN—(continued)

If you can fill your every boyish minute

With sixty seconds' worth of mischief done,

Yours is the house and everything that's in it,

And, which is more, you'll be your father's son!

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## THE ROCKING HORSE

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### FOR A BIRTHDAY

**A**T TWO years old the world he sees  
Must seem expressly made to please!  
Such new-found words and games to try,  
Such sudden mirth, he knows not why,  
So many curiosities!

As life about him, by degrees  
Discloses all its pageantries  
He watches with approval shy  
At two years old.

With wonders tired he takes his ease  
At dusk, upon his mother's knees:  
A little laugh, a little cry,  
Put toys to bed, then "seepy-bye"—  
The world is made of such as these  
At two years old.

SMELLS

WHY is it that the poets tell  
So little of the sense of smell?  
These are the odours I love well:

The smell of coffee freshly ground;  
Or rich plum pudding, holly crowned;  
Or onions fried and deeply browned.

The fragrance of a fummy pipe;  
The smell of apples, newly ripe;  
And printers' ink on leaden type.

Woods by moonlight in September  
Breathe most sweet; and I remember  
Many a smoky camp-fire ember.

Camphor, turpentine, and tea,  
The balsam of a Christmas tree,  
These are whiffs of gramarye. . . .  
*A ship smells best of all to me!*

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## THE ROCKING HORSE

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### SMELLS (JUNIOR)

**M**Y Daddy smells like tobacco and books,  
Mother, like lavender and listerine;  
Uncle John carries a whiff of cigars,  
Nannie smells starchy and soapy and clean.

Shandy, my dog, has a smell of his own  
(When he's been out in the rain he smells most);  
But Katie, the cook, is more splendid than all—  
She smells exactly like hot buttered toast!

MY FAVOURITE FLOWERS

THE yellow orchid why discuss,  
When you can *eat* asparagus!  
What stained-glass window could repeat  
The red-veined leafage of the beet?

What delicately mottled green  
Is in the humble, honest bean,  
And what a balm for sin and grief  
The crisp and curly lettuce leaf!

The corn, in green, translucent files,  
Shimmers like cathedral aisles,  
The cabbage that the frost has touched  
Is like a pigeon's throat unsmutched.

An onion, if you hold your nose,  
Is marvellous as any rose!

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## THE ROCKING HORSE

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### THE PLUMPUPPETS

**W**HEN little heads weary have gone to their  
bed,  
When all the good nights and the prayers have been  
said,  
Of all the good fairies that send bairns to rest  
The little Plumpuppets are those I love best.

*If your pillow is lumpy, or hot, thin and flat,  
The little Plumpuppets know just what they're at;  
They plump up the pillow, all soft, cool and fat—  
The little Plumpuppets plump-up it!*

The little Plumpuppets are fairies of beds:  
They have nothing to do but to watch sleepy heads;  
They turn down the sheets and they tuck you in  
tight,  
And they dance on your pillow to wish you good  
night!

No matter what troubles have bothered the day,  
Though your doll broke her arm or the pup ran  
away;  
Though your handies are black with the ink that  
was spilt—  
Plumpuppets are waiting in blanket and quilt.

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AT HOME

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THE PLUMPUPPETS—(continued)

*If your pillow is lumpy, or hot, thin and flat,  
The little Plumpuppets know just what they're at;  
They plump up the pillow, all soft, cool and fat—  
The little Plumpuppets plump-up it!*

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## THE ROCKING HORSE

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### DANDY DANDELION

**W**HEN Dandy Dandelion wakes  
And combs his yellow hair,  
The ant his cup of dewdrop takes  
And sets his bed to air;  
The worm hides in a quilt of dirt  
To keep the thrush away,  
The beetle dons his pansy shirt—  
They know that it is day!

And caterpillars haste to milk  
The cowslips in the grass;  
The spider, in his web of silk,  
Looks out for flies that pass.  
These humble people leap from bed,  
They know the night is done:  
When Dandy spreads his golden head  
They think he is the sun!

Dear Dandy truly does not smell  
As sweet as some bouquets;  
No florist gathers him to sell,  
He withers in a vase;  
Yet in the grass he's emperor,  
And lord of high renown;  
And grateful little folk adore  
His bright and shining crown.

## THE OLD TROUSERS

**W**HEN Daddy comes home from the office  
Then Sarah and Peter and John  
Go hunt out the old pair of trousers  
And beg him to hurry them on!  
Those ancient remarkable garments  
Are hung on the hall cupboard door;  
Their use is not ended, as they are intended  
For romps on the nursery floor.  
The raggy old trousers, the baggy old trousers,  
That romp on the nursery floor.

When Daddy lies down he's enormous-  
He is such a mountainous man!  
We bustle and hustle and tussle  
And climb to the top if we can.  
But then he rears up like a grizzly,  
And tumbles us off with a roar,  
And so far below him we hardly would know him,  
Down there on the nursery floor,  
If it weren't for the trousers, the jolly old trousers,  
That romp on the nursery floor.

Dad thinks that those trousers descended  
From some very old patriarch;

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## THE ROCKING HORSE

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### THE OLD TROUSERS—(continued)

He says they were carefully mended

For Noah to wear on the ark;

But though they are shabby and dusty

We love them and know what they're for;

And Mother will spare them while Daddy can wear  
them

For games on the nursery floor—

The old fraying trousers, the old playing trousers.

That romp on the nursery floor!

GROWING UP

SOME day I shall be too old for a crib,  
Old for a pinafore, old for a bib;  
Some day—and soon, at the rate that I've grown,  
I'll have a proper bed, all of my own.

Some day I'll have an allowance from Dad;  
I won't be scolded because I am "bad";  
Mother will let me cross streets unattended,  
The holes in my stockings won't have to be mended.

Some day I'll ride in the men's smoking car,  
And look at Dad's paper, and smell his cigar;  
And I'll have a razor and long-trouser suit,  
And then I will learn what it means to "commute."

Some day I'll eat with a fork, not a spoon;  
And these manly changes can't happen too soon;  
But one thing I'd like to keep up, if I might—  
Have Mother to tuck in my blankets at night!

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## THE ROCKING HORSE

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### KISSING

**W**HEN Daddy's had his morning shave  
His cheek is like a rose:  
No skin could be more smooth than his  
Before the stubble grows;  
And when he comes out from his bath,  
How I would hate to miss  
The clean and sleeky fragrance of  
My Daddy's morning kiss!

But when the evening hours come round,  
My Daddy's cheek has grown  
All rough with little prickly spikes,  
With scratchy bristle sown;  
While Mother's face is always soft,  
And so, at night, my bliss  
Is in the gentle coolness of  
My Mother's bedtime kiss!

SONG FOR A LITTLE HOUSE

I'M glad our house is a little house,  
Not too tall nor too wide:  
I'm glad the hovering butterflies  
Feel free to come inside.

Our little house is a friendly house  
It is not shy or vain;  
It gossips with the talking trees,  
And makes friends with the rain.

And quick leaves cast a shimmer of green  
Against our whited walls,  
And in the phlox, the courteous bees  
Are paying duty calls.

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## THE ROCKING HORSE

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### LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

NOT long ago I fell in love,  
But unreturned is my affection—  
The girl that I'm enamored of  
Pays little heed in my direction.

I thought I knew her fairly well:  
In fact, I'd had my arm around her;  
And so it's hard to have to tell  
How unresponsive I have found her.

For, though she is not frankly rude,  
Her manners quite the wrong way rub me:  
It seems to me ingratitude  
To let me love her—and then snub me!

Though I'm considerate and fond,  
She shows no gladness when she spies me—  
She gazes off somewhere beyond  
And doesn't even recognise me.

Her eyes, so candid, calm and blue,  
Seem asking if I can support her  
In the style appropriate to  
A lady like her father's daughter.

---

AT HOME

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LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT—(continued)

Well, if I can't, then no one can—  
And let me add that I intend to:  
She'll never know another man  
So fit for her to be a friend to.

Not love me, eh? She better had!  
By Jove, I'll make her love me one day;  
For, don't you see, I am her Dad,  
And she'll be three weeks old on Sunday!

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## THE ROCKING HORSE

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### AT A CHILD'S BEDSIDE

**I**S there one who has not smiled  
At the bedside of a child?  
If there be one, he has missed  
Earth's most tender eucharist.

Eager mind that, hour by hour,  
Opened, blossomed like a flower—  
To what secret honeycomb  
Have those wondering thoughts gone  
home?

Little hands and eyes set free  
From the day's immensity,  
Now relaxed and innocent  
In a questionless content.

Sleep then, sleep then, little guest;  
We will house thee at the best.  
Tiptoe, tiptoe, on the floor—  
Wake not God's ambassador!

PARADISE DEPRECATED

WHEN the faucets all stop dripping  
And the bathtub never leaks;  
When the house has weatherstripping  
Against the blizzard weeks;  
When the piping never freezes  
And plumbers cease to plumb,  
When every prospect pleases  
And we clean by vacuum—  
  
When wallpaper never blisters  
And plaster does not fall,  
When larcenous laundry sisters  
Plunder us not at all;  
When kitchen maids don't mutter  
And tablecloths show no stain,  
And husbands never utter  
A single word profane—  
  
When the rugs are never faded  
And eggs go down in price;  
When pantries are not raided  
By children or by mice—  
Then wives will never be weary,  
Commuters will all grow fat:  
But heavens! it would be dreary  
To live in a house like that!

A HALLOWE'EN MEMORY

**D**O you remember, Heart's Desire,  
The night when Hallowe'en first came?  
The newly dedicated fire,  
The hearth unsanctified by flame?

How anxiously we swept the bricks  
(How tragic, were the draught not right!)  
And then the blaze enwrapped the sticks  
And filled the room with dancing light.

We could not speak, but only gaze,  
Nor half believe what we had seen—  
*Our home, our hearth, our golden blaze,*  
*Our cider mugs, our Hallowe'en!*

And then a thought occurred to me—  
We ran outside with sudden shout  
And looked up at the roof, to see  
Our own dear smoke come drifting out.

And of all man's felicities  
The very subtlest one, say I,  
Is when for the first time he sees  
His hearthfire smoke against the sky.

NO ANSWER EXPECTED

**W**HO bade the planets veer and spin,  
And loop their vast festoons?  
Who tipped the earth and let her roll  
Unerring grooves of air?  
Who ruled the awful passages  
Of suns and earths and moons,  
And taught them how to pass and turn  
With a billion miles to spare?

Who balanced all these flying weights  
With poise and counterpoise?  
Who tossed these whimsic tricks in space  
Like marbles and tin cars?  
And will he, weary of his play,  
Fatigued by many toys,  
Discard his complex trinket box  
And shut its lid of stars?

AUTUMN COLOURS

**T**HE chestnut trees turned yellow,  
The oaks like sherry browned,  
The fir, the stubborn fellow,  
Stayed green the whole year round.

But O the bonny maple  
How richly he does shine!  
He glows against the sunset  
Like ruddy old port wine.

THE LAST CRICKET

WHEN the bulb of the moon with white  
fire fills

And dead leaves crackle under the feet,  
When men roll kegs to the cider mills  
And chestnuts roast on every street;

When the night sky glows like a hollow shell  
Of lusted emerald and pearl,  
The kilted cricket knows too well  
His doom. His tiny bagpipes skirl.

Quavering under the polished stars  
In stubble, thicket, and frosty copse  
The cricket blows a few choked bars,  
And puts away his pipe—and stops.

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## THE ROCKING HORSE

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### CHRISTMAS EVE

OUR hearts to-night are open wide,  
The grudge, the grief, are laid aside:  
The path and porch are swept of snow,  
The doors unlatched; the hearthstones glow—  
No visitor can be denied.

All tender human homes must hide  
Some wistfulness beneath their pride:  
Compassionate and humble grow  
Our hearts to-night.

Let empty chair and cup abide!  
Who knows? Some well-remembered stride  
May come as once so long ago—  
Then welcome, be it friend or foe!  
There is no anger can divide  
Our hearts to-night.

*INWARD HO!*



To  
JOSEPH CONRAD  
*A Novelist Who Understands  
as Poets Do*

*Reader, This Enchiridion I present thee with  
is the Fruit of Solitude: A School few care to  
learn in, tho' None instructs us better. Some  
Parts of it are the Result of serious Reflec-  
tion: Others the Flashings of Lucid Inter-  
vals: Writ for private Satisfaction, and now  
publish'd for an Help to Human Conduct.*

—WILLIAM PENN, *Some Fruits of Solitude*

## *Advertisement to the Reader*

You can't build a bonfire without the smoke getting into someone's eyes—chiefly your own. The reek from this little brush-pile may perhaps have made me, once or twice, a trifle bloodshot.

But, like most poets, I have always hankered to put down some of my private pensiveness about the nature and purport of literature (and especially poetry). This is not a book of literary criticism, but something much less skilful and much more important—an attempt to probe those disturbances and ecstasies that engender literature. It is an attempt to avert my eyes from facts. I even

## *Advertisement to the Reader*

thought of it as a sort of eccentric textbook for students. Hoping to ingratiate myself with serious people, I proposed to call it *Preliminary Ejaculations Tending Toward an Understanding of the Meaning of Poetry*. But when I wrote that down on the title-page it looked too formidable.

The book is short: but it seems very long to me, for every line in it has been lived before setting it down.

Practically all these soliloquies appeared first in the New York *Evening Post*, to which I can never be grateful enough for shelter and encouragement. I wonder if any other newspaper in the world would have been so patient?

*Roslyn, Long Island, July, 1923.*

*INWARD HO!*



## INWARD HO!

### *I. Not to Become a Slave*

NOT to become a slave, the first thing to determine is what is essential; and what may safely be neglected.

So, in a gush of incautious honesty, uncertain whether ecstatic or despairing, I depose my testimony.

\* \* \* \*

*Panem et circenses*: delicatessens and movies—these are all the populace insist upon, according to one theory.

And another antique philosopher said that the three elements that confuse and trouble human life are: the doings of kings, the passion of love, the nature of the gods.

And I concur: for the three problems of the twentieth century—and

## INWARD HO!

of any century—are War, Sex, and God.

(There is not a line in this inward manifest that could not be excellently expanded.)

\* \* \* \*

In every book ever published a thoughtful reader will somewhere write (?) and (!) on the margin.

But notwithstanding, let us read and think; for to-morrow we die.

Chasten the spirit, O Demiurge, for out of trouble and perplexity and happy anguish comes poetry that eases the heart.

And laughter is valiant; laughter purges and triumphs: but even laughter is not the whole. Laughter may whiles be cowardice, and mockery but sloth.

Blessed is he who has never been tempted; for he knows not the frailty of his rectitude.

And blessed is the satirist; and

## *Not to Become a Slave*

blessed the ironist; blessed the witty scoffer, and blessed the sentimentalist; for each, having seen one spoke of the wheel, thinks to have seen all, and is content.

\* \* \* \*

A young coloured buck and his doe drolled up on Sunday afternoon in the Easter rutting season, parading the pavement of Amsterdam Avenue, is nearly the most divinely comic sight in life.

Yet I do not laugh; for I know one sight more comic: myself.

\* \* \* \*

As a mother cares for her children, and never sleeps so deeply but she can hear them cry; as she fills a drawer with little shirts and laven-dered dresses for the baby who is coming (dresses so much longer than the infant itself), even so I lay away clean and softly folded words for that which is to be born. For I, too, am

## INWARD HO!

expectant; in the beautiful German phrase I am *guter Hoffnung*: I wait the arrival of Truth.

I have a tenderness for life and a loving-kindness for Truth; not even a puny one shall be born in my mind but I will nourish it and do it honour.

But Truth is always twins; for every truth is accompanied by its facsimile error—which is the application of that truth by literal-minded people.

Yet the only thing I fear is to die barren: to pass out before bearing my Truth and Beauty, in honour of this life so splendid. Though I cry aloud, though I die in truthbirth, let it be.

\* \* \* \*

I find, as I grope, that there is much meat in the ancient wisdom of men, much loveliness in their old troubled words. And though each must rediscover the whole world for himself,

## *Not to Become a Slave*

yet there is pride in knowing it has all been done before.

I do not expect you to understand me; and if you do not I shall pretend I do not care; but in your heart you shall envy me for trying to say my sooth.

I shall fail, as all men do; but I shall be happy. And I shall laugh, as I have always laughed; and I shall go through my terrors in secret.

I have said (not intentionally, but as all men clumsily do) so many words that did not honourably represent me; now I cut valiantly to the bone.

This is no perjury; this is no peristalsis. I elect my words gravely: each of them is older than I.

\* \* \* \*

For there is not a day nor an hour when I do not see more beauty than I can comprehend. What I choose here to set down is only what cohered in the chinks of a sieve.

## INWARD HO!

Suppose someone tried to write your biography. What nonsense! How much would he know? Would he know what you thought when you looked in the mirror of the subway slot-machine? How brutally you spoke to the children when you were angry? How Nature rode you with a busy spur? How you fell on your knees late at night?

Perhaps this is an age when men think bravely of the human spirit; for surely they have a strange lust to lay it bare.

\* \* \* \*

Perhaps the Church is trying to lock the stable door after the Messiah has been stolen.

Perhaps the mind of man is like a writer, shut in a small sanctum, busy upon his high, pure resolutions, his lovely self-imposed tasks, and appalled because he must rush into the next chamber to calm the agony and

## *Not to Become a Slave*

clamour of well-loved erring urchins.  
Naughty children scuffle at the door  
and cry *Come and play with us!*

\* \* \* \*

There is an innate decorum in man, and it is not fair to thrust Truth upon people when they don't expect it. Only the very generous are ready for Truth impromptu.

Generally speaking, I am not at home to Truth during office hours; late at night, after three cups of coffee, I hear her tap, and sometimes admit her. Truth lies at the bottom of a thermos bottle.

Perhaps there is no worthier granule of human sagacity than the conception of Truth being naked. If you will think about it, you will find endless value in the fable.

Be prepared for Truth at all hours and in the most fantastic disguises. This is the only safety.

Sporting reporters go South in

## INWARD HO!

March to get a sound perspective for the baseball season.

Literary reporters go inward, toward the equinox, to prepare for the spring issue of "realism."

And so much of what they call heresy, and new forms of art, is only saprise and erethism.

How silly to speak of the equinox. Day and Night are never equal. Day belongs to man, and Night to God.

\* \* \* \*

Students have looked everywhere for some one factor that might come to the rescue of a troubled earth. They have suggested Free Trade, Steam, Irrigation, Short Skirts, Electricity, Radio, White Coal, Liquid Fuel, Vaccination, the Atom, Passive Resistance, Glands, Competition, and Vitamines.

I am tempted to pin my faith on something more handy—Woman.

For if it is true (as it seems to be)

## *Not to Become a Slave*

that Woman will develop a mind commensurate with the clear validity of her instinct, humanity's problems may yet be solved.

And yet Woman is much the same as ourselves, only more so; viz., more determined.

\* \* \* \*

It seems to me interesting that the book with the most vegetarian title is, of all others, the most carnal—*Leaves of Grass*.

There are no strict vegetarians. Even Bernard Shaw eats eggs.

I had a million questions to ask God: but when I met Him, they all fled my mind; and it didn't seem to matter.

But even Abraham Lincoln returned from Gettysburg murmuring that he had forgotten the things he Really Wanted to Say.

Truth and Beauty (perhaps Keats was wrong in identifying them: per-

## INWARD HO!

haps they have the relation of Wit and Humour, or Rain and Rainbow) are of interest only to hungry people. There are several kinds of hunger.

If Socrates, Spinoza, and Santayana had had free access to a midnight icebox we would never have heard of them.

\* \* \* \*

Shall I be ashamed of my little mewling truths? Like the erring servant girl in *Midshipman Easy*, I ask to be forgiven: they are such tiny ones.

But it is hard, I tell you, not to decline into mere humour.

It is hard to be as fatally serious as is requisite.

For I weary of wild words, words preposterously clever; and I ask, for this moment, only the grave, clear sanity of the poet.

O my brother, every problem that has troubled you has troubled me also.

But little by little I learn what can

*Not to Become a Slave*

be disregarded, and what cannot;  
what messages need not be answered  
whether from men or stars.

\* \* \* \*

Loud sang the hearts of the Freu-  
dian adventurers—

Inward . . . Inward Ho!

## INWARD HO!

### *II. Have Faith in Poets*

**A**N ACORN sprouts two ways: one shoot downward into earth, one upward into leaves and sunlight. So, please, with poems. Every poem-bulb gropes doubly: rooting toward the rich soil of truth, lifting into the free air of beauty.

For certainly it is nonsense to say that truth and beauty are the same. Truth is the strong compost in which beauty may sometimes germinate. These paragraphs, for instance, are not poetry; they are only a box of bulbs in a wintry cellar; but they are the stuff of which (with labour and luck) poetry might be made.

\* \* \* \*

The essence of poetry is the intuition of strange analogies and surpris-

## *Have Faith in Poets*

ing similitudes. The restraint of the poet is not to ascribe too much meaning to that which is really insignificant. The courage of the poet is to keep ajar the door that leads into madness. The poet is the Pandora of the mind.

\* \* \* \*

Poetry is like an unexpected noise in the night: the creak of a door, the footstep on the porch, the soft scuffle of a moth against the screen, which rouses every sense to an instant alert. So comes poetry to the drowsy mind, which startles a moment, wonders, and returns to sleep.

\* \* \* \*

Even the most innocent of men's affairs seem doomed to cause suffering. Pushing the lawnmower through tall wet grass, and enjoying the strong aroma of the morning, I found that the blades had cut a frog in half. I have not forgotten his eyes.

\* \* \* \*

## INWARD HO!

After long dipping into pale gray and blue inks, at last I have found a bottle of real fluid. *Nubian Intense Black* it calls itself—ink worthy to write honourable truth; ink that collaborates with the pen.

So I say to myself that the one essential secret (for me, at any rate) is to have faith in poets, for they speak a language I can understand. They know the meaning of that old Latin phrase *Desiderio pulchriora*: things are more beautiful when we yearn for them: and indeed the man (whoever he was) who first wrote those words is more present to my spirit than many I see daily in my affairs.

\* \* \* \*

Have faith in poets, for they have not been ashamed to tell you that men suffer. They have not been afraid to look life in the face: and often the encounter is more comforting than you had expected.

## *Have Faith in Poets*

And the poet out-argues Nature. For Nature's only duty is to be plausible: to cry to men (Oh, golden thrilling voice!): *Yield you to my gallant impulses, be obedient to my genial sophistry: be untroubled, these are the great laws of life.* But the poet appeals to a Higher Plausibility: the very lattice of his cage, he finds, plots the world in lovely little squares. The success is not to outwit Nature (that none can do), but to outwit self; to convince the heart that it is more fun to lose than to win. Do you hear the poets crying that the very essence of Beauty is desire, frustration, non-attainment? Brave souls, they are busy convincing themselves!

So charmingly have they uttered their despairing incantations, even Nature is sometimes half persuaded they are right.

\* \* \* \*

## INWARD HO!

The poet pursues the trouble in your heart as pitilessly as he has ferreted out his own. So, unless you have courage to face it, give him no access.

Did you think that yourself was the only lifelong companion you could ever have? Did you believe that you, solitary you, were the only one who would ever quite understand you? And did you sometimes weary even of that unbearable intimate? All the while the poets knew: they were waiting for you round the corner. Your terrors and disgusts were theirs, too: heats, fiery welcomes, anguishes, denials. They, too, have wooed life with good heart, have seen her eyes darken with exquisite anxiety and yet look bravely straight; have shaken off (for a moment) the heavy armour of triviality; have dared to put away mere laughter—that they might, a little later, laugh with added gust.

\* \* \* \*

## *Have Faith in Poets*

The poet is a reporter, interviewing his own heart. As always in interviewing, it is so much easier to remember the questions we asked (how well, we plume ourselves, we phrased them!) than the exact answers given by that Celebrated Stranger. And we, by the mere fact of asking, determined the course and tone of the colloquy. To ask questions is to shake loaded dice. How easy it is to attribute to him surmises or points of view that really sprang from our own habits of thinking.

\* \* \* \*

The older generation (hotly cries a young poet) "was afraid of beauty." Ah, my dear, a little hesitation is no inglorious posture before that doorway. Did you think Beauty was so easy and merry a companion? Perhaps you were confusing Beauty with Having a Good Time. Beauty is lonely company and bitter food.

## INWARD HO!

It is "too like the lightning, which doth cease to be ere one can say it lightens." And if you pause to consider, you will admit that it exists mostly in memories. Only in the quietness of afterthought can one seem to grasp it, see its outlines, catch some glimpse of its meaning.

\* \* \* \*

For Beauty lies not in ourselves merely, but in some sudden congruence between our lovelier perceptions and the actual lineaments of the world. Then, in that burning breath, we are too flustered to honour the moment. Only the wistful retrospect can sieve and separate those granules of felicity. Time ticks on, ticks on, ticks on: all we can accumulate is memories, and a riper sensibility for future accidents of happiness; which also will, in the very act of arrival, become mere memories. But by saying "mere" memories we do not de-

## *Have Faith in Poets*

grade them: for these are the very element of art, which is only one way of honouring life. "Oh, clumsy lackwit mind!" (you are tempted to cry). "Why was I not aware, why not more sensitive, more prompt to recognize the Perfect Moment when it was here?" But it is idle to chide: we identify Beauty by the way she says good-bye.

\* \* \* \*

Put all your faith in poets. You will find few others to share Beauty with you; and it cannot be borne alone. The poet performs the greatest of social functions: he elucidates the secrets of other hearts by eavesdropping at his own. At the bottom of almost every heart is terror. But it comforts men to know that others are also afraid. It is because we hardly know what we ourselves think that we are endlessly eager to know the thoughts of others. The poets

## INWARD HO!

discover us to ourselves; and they speak not apprehensively, not embarrassed, not beshrewed and distracted by a muddle of affairs, but in that perfection of power and happiness that comes of impassioned solitude. By making us share their sufferings they have eased themselves, and eased us, too.

\* \* \* \*

So I ask for wisdom to be silent when poets are speaking: lest, when they tremble on the syllable of lovely meanings, my cursed garrulous haste divert or dull the dear edge of their wit. How many urgencies they have neglected to tell me the truth; shall not I also shred off some trivialities for the worth of my soul? It is not poets who crush us with meaningless randoms. And I think I know, better than you, what is important for me.

## *Moby Walt*

### *III. Moby Walt*

**N**OT long ago a friendly correspondent accused me of not being in sympathy with the Younger Generation. I smiled faintly to myself. For is not my favourite (or at any rate one of my favourite poets) the youngest, the most modern, the most generously daring and terribly inscrutable of them all? Yes, I mean Walt Whitman.

An evening with Walt is not an experience to be undertaken too often, nor (as the Prayer Book says of matrimony) "lightly, unadvisedly." It is too exhausting, too like toying with dynamite. In him there are lines—hundreds of them—that pierce clean through to the root of the mat-

## INWARD HO!

ter. One test of a really good parson, I have sometimes thought, is this: Could he preach an intelligible sermon on *The Song of Myself*? "It requireth courage stout." As G. K. Chesterton said, a number of years ago, "We have not yet begun to get to the beginning of Whitman."

That great shaggy tract of the spirit which Walt staked out has not yet been colonized except around its fringes. A whole school of young poets has grown up, settled like bushwhackers on the edges of Walt's territory. "Promulge the body and the soul," he said (in his quaint way; and we have been beginning to suspect, sometimes, that perhaps we have been wrong in saying so often that Walt was totally lacking in humour. But that is a topic in itself). Well, how the young poets have promulged them! With terrible promulsions. "Nor will my poems do good only,"

## *Moby Walt*

said he; "they will do just as much evil." Aye, indeed. There are terrific things in the Whitman bush. In that back country, where the hardy spirits of young poets go pioneering, stripped down to the bare necessities of life, there are drought and pestilence. An occasional wanderer comes back witless and haggard, his face darkened with a more than tropical sun. Others come back not at all. But, for the disciplined and stout hearted, it is well to plunge in with pannikin and billy. In his rough, melodious lines are the seeds of innumerable richness. He jets poem-stuff: effuses it, as he would say. Moby Walt! He became a great poet when he quit being Walter and was Walt.

It is pleasant to imagine what a man like Keats would have thought about Walt. "Howls restrained by decorum," said Walt somewhere. Jun-

## INWARD HO!

kets, perhaps, would have found the restraint inadequate. But unless a man once in a while spends an evening really trying to get the *Song of Myself* under his hide, he knows little of what America really means—or might mean. And our imagined parson, preaching a sermon on that amazing testament, or on such a piece as *Starting from Paumanok*, or *Song of the Answerer*, what unsuspected alliance he would find. Walt, a burly old Blucher, coming to the rescue in the very crisis of Waterloo. "No man has ever yet been half devout enough." Yes, here is the flag of our disposition, of hopeful green stuff woven. "The words of my book nothing, the drift of it everything."

*Leaves of Grass* fulfils the ultimate test of genius: which is that if it is approached by those incommensurable with it, it will very likely drive them mad. In the absolute sense of the

## *Moby Walt*

word, the great majority of readers are not "up" to it. Walt himself was very positive on this point. "Stuffed with the stuff that is coarse, and stuffed with the stuff that is fine."—"What can be answered, he answers, and what cannot be answered, he shows how it cannot be answered."—"Go lull yourself with what you can understand, and with piano tunes. For I lull nobody, and you will never understand me." The percentage of mania among Whitman devotees is very high. It is, in very truth, a dangerous book. If censors were worth their hire, they would be harking back to Walt, and not worrying about such pale and meagre indiscretions as *Casanova's Homecoming*. And yet very likely it is nobler to be crazed by Walt than never to be crazed at all. "And when you rise in the morning, you will find what I tell you is so."

## INWARD HO!

It is a hard lesson he teaches us. It is a long, tough doctrine to ponder, this tossing away of natural and defensive instinct, the decent inquiry *Will people like this? Is it tactful, or will it offend? Will it be misunderstood?* Of course Walt, like every other nourishing viand, needs to be chewed, not just bolted. The gassy indigestion of many groups of young poets has been due to their swallowing Walt in lumps. Mastication promotes the dissolvent juices, mentally as well as physically.

Many of the complaints against Walt have been due equally to this lack of "grinding" (as the dentists love to say) on the part of hopeful readers. To complain of the garrulous jargon, the grotesque tags of French, the catalogues, is to look a gift Pegasus in the mouth: to be a mere veterinary to the horse with wings. "I dilate you with tremen-

## *Moby Walt*

dous breath." Let him promulge, let him effuse. Grant him his terrific attempt to say the unsayable. His proof, as he predicted, has been sternly deferred. It shall be deferred, he said, "till his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it." Which, doubtless, will never happen. But the least one can do is read him in his own triumphant, rigorous spirit:

Resist much, obey little,  
Once unquestioning obedience, once fully en-  
slaved,  
No nation, state, city, ever afterwards re-  
sumes its liberty.

I have always wanted to insert "person" in that third line, just after "city."

It is odd, too, that Walt's prose is so little known. The least known American classic, I have often thought. But it is impertinent to be dogmatic on these topics. Of writers Walt perhaps most of all does not

## *INWARD HO!*

transpire through mediation. There he stands, "aplomb in the midst of irrational things." "I will report all heroism from an American point of view."

## *In the Smoker*

### *IV. In the Smoker*

SITTING here in "The Mohawk," en route to Utica, in a wise passiveness, in a wholesome tranquillity, what are one's thoughts?

First, that writing is, after all, a subordinate and secondary art (or sport). For the greatest happiness of existence is Thinking; or, to be a little more precise, that mixture of Thinking and Feeling that constitutes an agreeable awareness of living without too definite intention of doing anything about it.

\* \* \* \*

Parenthetical Thought: What do we mean by "Feeling"? This is important, for the whole trend of

## INWARD HO!

contemporary literature is an attempt to get honestly closer to the texture of consciousness. In other words, literature is now probably more genuinely "sentimental" than ever before. To the devil with those who pretend to ridicule sentiment! In Pearsall Smith's *Trivia*, for instance, a book that blithely ferrets the heart, you will see what a dainty perfume, what a volatile vinaigrette, what an intellectual smelling salts, sentiment may be.

Carl Sandburg, also, ticketed by some as a "rugged realist," is really one of the most delicately sentimental of poets. His publisher once blurbed him as a "roughneck"; but he has tasted some of the roughnectar of the gods.

\* \* \* \*

The second happiness, we suppose, is Talking; but it is very rare. Certainly writing cannot be given higher

### *In the Smoker*

rank than third among life's pleasures.

Queer that some people seem to believe there is something inhuman and bloodless in the love of books; for indeed only passionate wooers of life are real amorists of print: for in books—some books—one finds the human heart at its most real, its most thrilling actuality. In their pages we attain something of that happy excorporation or transmigrance that poets have always yearned for. In the words of Rupert Brooke's noble lines, we

Hear, know, and say  
What this tumultuous body now denies;  
And feel, who have laid our groping hands  
away;  
And see, no longer blinded by our eyes.

\* \* \* \*

Loveliest of all phrases—"a foreigner." For there are moments when the spirit realizes that it is forever a foreigner in this strange, delicious

## INWARD HO!

world: that it is a stranger even  
to the embarrassing body it so pre-  
cariously inhabits; that it can never  
quite comprehend the ways of earth.

Strange the world about me lies,  
Never yet familiar grown—  
Still disturbs me with surprise,  
Haunts me like a face half known.

In this house with starry dome,  
Floored with gemlike plains and seas,  
Shall I never feel at home,  
Never wholly be at ease?

—WILLIAM WATSON.

Occasionally, in glimpses of unexpected loveliness, in thrilling far-away voices, the mind seems to see and hear (maddeningly, enchantingly) something it momentarily understands, that makes it feel at home. And even then, these instants have a cruel habit of happening just at conjunctions when they cannot be honoured and savoured. Doggedly the uneasy spirit returns to the stammering task of making intelligible

## *In the Smoker*

the few phrase-book catchwords it has learned. For, alas, I am forever a foreigner, and so are you.

\* \* \* \*

And there was another thought.  
What was it . . . ? It's gone.

\* \* \* \*

The fascination (sitting in the last car of the train) of seeing the engine, far ahead, rounding a curve with that busy elbowing movement of pistons, and flashing jets of steam! Just so, sitting at the tail of a train of thought, one sometimes catches an enigmatic glimpse of something, one knows not just what, pulling us furiously on.

\* \* \* \*

Going up the Hudson on that mild, airy morning, seeing sparse sprinkles of whiteness powdered here and there upon the grave shouldering hills, a sort of refrain ran in my mind, a sentimental farewell to the delights of winter. *And there's still a little*

## INWARD HO!

*snow on the mountains*, I said to myself (humming it, if I must be horribly frank, to a little cheerful tune of my own making). *And there's still a little snow on the mountains*. Then (why does irony always lie in wait for one so harmless?) just below Albany the sun was turned off like a bulb and we ran plump into a blizzard of gale and snow. Trudging up the hilltop at Hamilton College that evening, through blinding squalls and swathes of storm, wearing a thin overcoat and thinner evening clothes, I remembered my little ditty. *And there's still a little snow on the mountains!*

\* \* \* \*

Meditation in the dining car: it is oddly erroneous to believe that quite simple and untutored people are not able to enjoy sophisticated pleasures. One would imagine, for instance, that highly flavoured cheeses, such as Camembert and Roquefort, with their

### *In the Smoker*

delicate ammonia of putrefaction,  
would not be relished by a completely  
virginal palate. Yet dogs adore them.

\* \* \* \*

It is saddening to see that quarter-mile of ships tied along shore somewhere up the Hudson (don't remember exactly where it is). Ships craftily built, that might be out enjoying blue horizons, ignominiously tethered together like a leash of toy balloons. Unmoor the ships! They remind one of the emotions and adventurous aspirations of man, tightly hawsered in by social inhibitions. Unmoor the ships!

But, before unmooring them, be quite certain they are seaworthy.

\* \* \* \*

Many a man has been unfitted for literature, and certainly for journalism, by too injudicious a desire to tell the truth.

One of the most valuable philo-

## INWARD HO!

sophical features of journalism is that it realizes that truth is not a solid but a fluid. It is not easy to tell the truth, nor is it always advisable.

\* \* \* \*

The *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, by Wittgenstein (of whom they speak nowadays as "the modern Spinoza"), ends thus:

My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up on it.

He must surmount these propositions; then he sees the world rightly.

Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.

The perplexing feature is, you cannot tell whether the thing is unsayable or not until after you have made your attempt to say it. If you never attempt it, you will never know.

\* \* \* \*

## *In the Smoker*

But an even more disturbing work is "in preparation," so we see in a publisher's announcement. It is called "The Meaning of Meaning."

\* \* \* \*

Life is a favourite book lent by the Demiurge to humanity, with the injunction to mark the things they like specially. And the Demiurge is annoyed because they insist on marking the wrong passages.

## INWARD HO!

### V. *A Current-event Film*

**I**N A current-event film I saw the Stars and Stripes lowered at Ehrenbreitstein. I wondered why I was so moved. Is it because I have never been able to think of that flag as merely an American symbol, but in some sense the flag of all the world?

Walt Whitman suggests the same thought in his *Thick-Sprinkled Bunting*:

. . . flag of man—O with sure and steady  
step, passing highest flags of kings.  
Walk supreme to the heavens mighty sym-  
bol—run up above them all,  
Flag of stars! thick-sprinkled bunting!

And I thought, seeing the pictures  
of returning American soldiers with  
their Rhineland wives and babies,

## *A Current-event Film*

that the simple human hunger of some Dakota leatherneck when he looked into the gray eyes of a Coblenz shop-girl is more powerful than wars and armies—and perhaps equally ironical.

\* \* \* \*

But it is not easy to know what you think—or even whether you *are* thinking. You are stirred with an uninterpretable thrill, that is all.

Yet on the fringes of that thrill, thought lurks. Without it there is no thinking that amounts to much. Is the mind merely a tagger-on at the heels of emotion?

\* \* \* \*

The greatest harm, perhaps, is done by those who feel it necessary to pretend to be thinking when they are really only digesting their latest meal. And probably people who are too copiously fed rarely think at all. The stomach is a dangerous traitor to the mind

\* \* \* \*

## INWARD HO!

How dull and flat, however, life  
would be if all our follies and errors  
were laundered and ironed. How  
few poems would be written; how  
miserable the idealists would be.

\* \* \* \*

The difficulty with ecclesiastical  
creeds is not that they are too hard to  
believe, but too easy.

\* \* \* \*

If you believe a thing, it is true.

\* \* \* \*

The chambered nautilus is a lovely  
creature; but I would not trust him as  
a hydrographer.

\* \* \* \*

I had a vision—I don't remember  
whether I was awake or asleep—of a  
bronzed, resolute, lean troubled face  
that seemed to be stemming the rush  
of a great wind. It was as if a living  
man were bound as the figurehead of  
a ship in a gale. I thought, why  
should we so lightly cast aside all the

## *A Current-event Film*

accumulated and inherited speculations, dreams, and agonies of the human kind? Why so gayly presume to be able to reason these things for ourselves? And why, unless human destiny is something beyond our suspicion, should the explorer—and even the far-off reader—tremble with awe at the sill of Tutankhamen's tomb?

\* \* \* \*

I have felt somewhat the same thrill looking up at an old crumbling figure of the Virgin and Child, niched high in a pinnacle over a lonely Oxford cloister. Whatever any one has believed, or thought he believed, has, to amateurs of humanity, a sacred aspect.

\* \* \* \*

There are other societies, more sophisticated than our own, in which theological indigestion is no longer News. But America is still a government of the naïve, for the naïve, and by the naïve. He who does not know

## INWARD HO!

this, nor relish it, has no inkling of the nature of his country.

\* \* \* \*

Oxford has always been considered, and with justice, the shrine of Anglican Toryism in religious matters. The home of lost causes, they used to call her; though one may think that a cause which is still espoused in so lovely a place as Oxford cannot really be utterly Lost. But even at Oxford you will find in the Examination Statutes the following generous latitude:

Candidates who object on religious grounds to the examination in Holy Scripture are entitled to offer the equivalent, which may be either Plato's *Apologia*, *Meno*, or Pascal's *Pensées*.

\* \* \* \*

The greatest poet America has produced—Walt Whitman—is the priest and apostle of naïveté: so far on round the arc of naïveté, indeed, that he

### *A Current-event Film*

joins hands with the ultra-sophisticates. To me, it seems that there can never be any excuse for complete dejection as long as one can read *Leaves of Grass*. But I am not always strong enough to do so.

\* \* \* \*

And again, how about the “interminable average fallows of humanity” — the “ploughing up” of whom, Walt said, was the main justification and purpose of These States. Can “natural and nonchalant persons” read Walt and get anything but the rather rank savour? Can they ever “affectionately absorb” him, as he claims to have absorbed them? That is the Whitman enigma in a nutshell. And, as he wisely said (in that temperate, statesmanlike, soberly pleaded valedictory, *A Backward Glance O’er Travel’d Roads*: which badly needs to be read by those who think Walt was only a Hairy Ape)—“nothing less

## INWARD HO!

than a hundred years from now (1888) can fully answer." Only a third of that hundred years has elapsed: and to me it seems that I cannot pick up the poems without finding, on almost every page, lines pertinently aimed toward the very boss and nubbin of To-day. But how about our natural and nonchalant persons? What do they think? Do I believe Whitman to be growing and fructifying merely because I find him sprouting and bearing crops in my own mind? There is no gauge or spirit-level that can certainly measure these impalpables.

\* \* \* \*

To take only one example. We have all, whatever our political credulity or economic leaning, had a sort of subconscious feeling that you can't ever judge France quite in the same way that you judge other nations. Her history and temper are exceptional; it is only the black-and-white

### *A Current-event Film*

doctrinaires and radical intellectuals who are so preposterous as not to realize that her psyche is peculiar. The multiplication table and the logarithms do not apply. But Walt saw this, and nobly said it, over fifty years ago, in *O Star of France*:

Star panting o'er a land of death, heroic  
land,  
Strange, passionate, mocking, frivolous'  
land,  
Miserable! yet for thy errors, vanities, sins,  
I will not now rebuke thee,  
Thy unexampled woes and pangs have  
quell'd them all,  
And left thee sacred.

Am I wrong in thinking that this is one of the wisest, the most coldly sagacious, of political utterances? For until the uneasy spirit of France is calmed, there can hardly be much security in Europe. When the French are happy, the world is at ease. And

## INWARD HO!

in these matters the mistakes of one are the mistakes of all.

\* \* \* \*

Walt's ecstatic vision of America—a hundred million savans, philosophers, libertads, camerados, and Perfect Mothers, bustling on the trottoirs or promulging themselves on the wide prairies—was, one fears, a trifle risible. He himself suspected it as being vague, for he had a way of evading any exact programme or prophecy. "I merely ejaculate," he said. He ejaculated and passed on, leaving it to us to work out the details. And we are equally inclined to pass the buck one stage further. But one thing, at any rate, one learns from him—not to be afraid of one's secret surmisings. It is hard; for thoughts that seem so valid and interesting to one's self often prove to be merest bombast or truism when exposed in ink. But if democracy means any-

### *A Current-event Film*

thing, it means that occasionally one must have the courage of one's midnight suspicions, and strip them for public scrutiny. Too often we speir timidly at our own minds in the manner of the Elders watching Susannah; or like the Two Thomases—Doubting and Peeping. Therefore one occasionally discards even the defensive plural, and adopts the naked I.

## INWARD HO!

### *VI. The "English Problem"*

SOME weeks ago I received the following letter from the Department of Educational Research of the Board of Education of an important Western city:

' We English teachers find it very difficult to teach children how to write sentences correctly—how to develop a feeling for the completeness, clearness, and correctness of a sentence, a sentence consciousness, or a "sentence sense." It is tremendously important that we teach them how to do this.

In my study of the problem I am trying to find just what our trouble is and how to remedy it.

Will you be good enough to tell me how you think teachers ought to go at this part of the English problem?

1. How did you develop your technical skill in handling the sentence? Think of

## *The "English Problem"*

Benjamin Franklin's way and Stephenson's way, and then tell me your way.

2. Do you think children develop their skill by learning rules of grammar?

3. Do you think they develop their skill by practice in theme writing under the immediate stimulus of good, interesting models?

I reprint this letter, after some hesitation, because it is obviously sincere and because I should like to be able to help. I cannot answer the questions our friend puts; but they suggest some general meditations.

\* \* \* \*

Mere correctness is a very minor feature of learning to write. It becomes important later; but the first thing to realize is that language is not a commodity, but only a medium of exchange. Children, as a rule, write beautifully, charmingly, interestingly, because their thinking is novel and fresh.

Language is a vehicle for knowledge

## INWARD HO!

and feeling. Those who have neither exact knowledge nor profound feeling—which are usually the result of experience—can hardly be expected to use the vehicle in any stirring or creative manner. A taxi without a passenger cruises in a gentle fabian fashion. It is only the taxi with a fare inside that spins briskly to its destination.

\* \* \* \*

I suspect that the art of writing cannot be taught. The utmost you can do is try to make the pupil sensitive to words. There is no shibboleth, no esoteric quiddity. The enjoyment of great writers is, obviously, the most feasible assistance. Ideally, writing should become almost unconscious: as natural as breathing or digesting. It should follow thought's vestiges like a shadow. It can never be quite that; but language should not be something we climb, like a cliff; rather something in which we float, like water.

## *The "English Problem"*

Words are our employees, but not our helots. To enforce this by a monstrous pun, the dictionary is Uncle Tome, not Uncle Tom. Words (it is odd how few realize this) have their rights. They have their own meanings, and most of them are much our seniors. They have their birth-right meanings, their outgrown meanings, their present meanings. One test of a lover of words is that he shall know, and have some regard for, their original senses. Unless a man knows a fair amount of Latin, German, and French, and a small smatter of Greek, he walks at random through the forest of English speech.

It is astonishing, by the way, how many students are content with grotesquely inadequate dictionaries. The most valuable inexpensive book to a sincere lover of English words is *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, which

## INWARD HO!

costs no more than a theatre ticket and will give you amusement enough for a lifetime.

\* \* \* \*

“Sentence sense.” A sentence, I suppose, is a unit of thought; an opinion, a feeling, a sentiment. If the pupils’ sentences are vague it is either because their thoughts are vague or they are (at the moment of writing) fogged in that troublesome vapour that often (with us all) rises between the mind and the pen. Literature is a vibration that passes from one mind to another; both our transmitters and our receivers are imperfect in themselves and imperfect in mutual adjustment. This regrettable haze, this “static,” is a serious difficulty. Anything that makes for uncertainty in transmission must (if possible) be discarded. An example of uncertainty: How are we to know whether our correspondent really can spell *Steven-*

## *The "English Problem"*

son, or whether the *ph* is only a stenographer's error?

When thought is clear, and when the use of words has become reasonably facile, the chance is that the sentence will be clear. In sum: The problem is to teach ourselves to think, and the writing will take care of itself.

\* \* \* \*

But writing is also, in its subtler phases, an art; like all arts, it must be performed either unconsciously or with extreme sophistication. A child writes well, and a highly trained and long-suffering performer may sometimes write with intelligence. It is the middle stages that are appalling. If our friend can encourage his pupils to think for themselves he will do great patriotic service. The use of words in American public life is grotesque; it is ludicrous; it is damnable. Many of our officials would be more intelligible, and certainly more humorous, if

## INWARD HO!

they were required to paint their ideas on canvas.

\* \* \* \*

The problems of writing are specially fascinating because we have to utilize an instrument which is at once debased and exalted; vulgar and sensitive; familiar and strange. For the expression of our most delicate emotions, aspirations, reasonings, we have only this same common speech, which is already roughened and marred by constant, automatic, and heedless use. When we wish to explain, with some purity and dignity, our more generous and essential feelings we must resort to the poor counters of habitual utterance that we have shuffled so often and worn so smooth. It is as though we took a delicate Swiss watch to a jeweller, showed him some stricture in the cobweb mechanism, and asked him to repair it with a knife and fork.

## *Fontainebleau and Vesey Street*

### *VII. Fontainebleau and Vesey Street*

**WE** SEEM to see a small but interesting cloud rising over the skyline, and we gird up our typewriter ribbon to utter a modest prophecy.

After consulting the stars, poking round in the back corners of foreign newspapers, and going into a pensive brief tranquillity, we are moved to say that we think we have spotted the next "sensation" in the intellectual world. By which we mean the newspaper Feature which will succeed M. Coué and various other horizon-seeking movements that have been specially busy since the war.

Keep your eye on Mr. Gurdjieff and

## INWARD HO!

his "Forest House" at Fontainebleau. Mr. Gurdjieff, we learn, conducts some sort of colony in the Forest of Fontainebleau, where with music, rhythmic gymnastics, quaint costumes, perfumed fountains, and "mystical" discipline, the inner secrets of life are resolutely pursued. With Mr. Gurdjieff, so it is said, is associated Mr. Ouspensky, the author of *Tertium Organum*, a book that has been very highly spoken of by competent authorities.

\* \* \* \*

A number of very well-known English writers have been mentioned (in the London papers) as disciples of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky; but as several of these have recently replied disclaiming the connection, we think it better not to give their names. We first heard of the "Forest House" when we read that the late Katherine Mansfield, that very interesting writer,

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had been staying there. And her husband, Middleton Murry, a clear-headed critic, writes of the "Gurdjieff Institute" (in a letter to the *London Daily News*) that "there is no charlatanry about it. Something quite real is being attempted there. What that something real is cannot be defined in a letter, or in many letters. But the most important of my conclusions (to my own mind) was that, so far as I could see, that Institute did not solve the problem it professed to solve: It merely made its adherents unconscious of the problem for a time. In other words—highly metaphorical words, no doubt—it was a drug, a very potent and searching drug, but one of whose ultimate beneficence no man living can speak with authority."

One realizes, of course, that in using the word "drug" Mr. Murry speaks—as he takes care to warn—figuratively. And he exhibits his

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usual sagacity in the distinction he draws. It is the function of almost all æsthetic and metaphysical rhapsodists to cause happiness by temporarily numbing the awareness of Insolubility. This—we say it in all sincerity—is not something to be merely chaffed. We are heartily in favour of anæsthetizing the reason as long as possible—provided you know what you are doing.

\* \* \* \*

We are pleased also that Mr. Gurdjieff has chosen the Forest of Fontainebleau as the seat of his “Institute.” We spent several weeks in the cherry-blossom season of our youth rambling round that forest; it has always had a curiously mystical and uplifting effect. There was a Scandinavian companion of ours in that spring of 1912 who was so hilarified by the loveliness of those sun-dappled aisles of woodland and the

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clear, cool elixir of the April air that he behaved almost like a Sherwood Anderson character. He forswore food, lived on dry toast and lemon juice in water, and used to strip off his clothes and run stark in the lonely alleys of the forest, praying to pine trees and uttering uncouth Scandinavian outcries of demiurge and ecstasy. We ourself managed to keep our mysticism in check by bathing in the green ice-cold water of the stripling Loing: if Mr. Gurdjieff has tried it in early April he will agree with us that it will chill the most fiery frizzlings of the insurgent heart.

\* \* \* \*

It appears from an article in the London *New Statesman* that Mr. Gurdjieff—"of Greek origin, but spent his youth in Persia"—organized an expedition thirty years ago to investigate "the wisdom of the East." He and other savants set out for Thibet,

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where they spent twenty years or more; some of them, apparently, were swallowed up by the delights of esoteric wisdom, for they have never reappeared. But Mr. Gurdjieff returned eventually, "with a mass of material." This material "covers almost every branch of human knowledge, with the exception of pure mathematics, regarding which the East appears to have nothing to teach the West." Particularly in regard to psychology, music, and medicine, the *New Statesman* writer (he signs himself "C.") is convinced, "Mr. Gurdjieff and his colleagues possess knowledge in advance of anything known to European science."

Mr. C.'s references to the Gurdjieff Institute at Fontainebleau are delightfully stimulating in their piquant indefiniteness. In the first place, we are rather relieved to learn that there is no immediate likelihood of

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Gurdjieff becoming another Coué. The movement, Mr. C. says, "has no appeal to the million. The general public will never be able to grasp the meaning of the work."

\* \* \* \*

This is the right way to go about getting us all interested. If any one tells us that there is something we can't possibly understand, naturally we are on fire to disprove the suggestion.

Of the Forest School we read:

The life is very simple and uncomfortable, the food is adequate but too starchy for an ordinary stomach, the work is extremely hard. The physical work, indeed, results often in a degree of exhaustion which perhaps exceeds anything that was produced even by a prolonged spell in the winter trenches of Flanders in 1917. Yet behind it all there is no theory either of asceticism or of the "simple life." Work at Fontainebleau is a medicine and a curse. Carried to extremes it creates in-

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creased capacity for effort and provides rich material for self-study—no more than that. Cold, hunger, and physical exhaustion are things to be endured not for their own sake, nor to acquire “merit” of any description, but simply for the sake of understanding the physical mechanism, making the most of it, and ultimately of bringing it into subjection. Other conditions provided at the “Institute”—with an ingenuity that is almost diabolical—offer similar opportunities for the study of the emotional mechanism, but that side of the work cannot be described in a few words or sentences and must here be passed over.

This, as you see, grows more and more exciting. For our own part, we have had a very strong hunch about Mr. Gurdjieff ever since we first heard of him. He seems to throw off vibrations (Mr. C., by the way, says that the only historical comparison he can think of is the Pythagorean school in Italy about 550 B. C.). There are many fascinating things going on nowadays, and humanity

## *Fontainebleau*

evidently has hold of the bear's tail, even if it is whirling us round the stump rather rapidly and bewilderingly.

\* \* \* \*

But we find the neighbourhood of Vesey Street just as diabolically (or divinely) ingenious for the stimulation of our "emotional mechanism" as any Gurdjieffite can find the provoking disciplines and rituals of the Forest Institute. Have you ever, for instance, seen a snowstorm from the top of the Woolworth Building? If you go up there in bad weather the curator will tell you sternly that "you won't see anything"; but how does he know what you are looking for? Or darling Vesey Street in clear winter dusks, fires burning in the roadway among piles of dirty snow; the Lightning statue flaming in the noon, darkly golden in the dayfall; the criss-cross webbing of Brooklyn Bridge against

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the sky, where you may see the whole piled miracle of Down-Town airily reticulated in oblique coördinates; these are all thorns of loveliness that prickle in the mind, and each can be his own Gurdjieff if he desires.

\* \* \* \*

Or there is also, on Barclay Street (a street of terrific miracles, that runs the gamut of human affairs from the old shard of the Astor House and the mystic loveliness of St. Peter's Church, down to the delights of Gorgonzola cheese and the Hoboken Ferry)—there is on Barclay Street a Swiss cuckoo-clock shop that offers a hauntingly agreeable scene for a story, a play, a parable, or any other sort of prettiness. To go into that shop, where hundreds of quaint and humorous timepieces are simultaneously and competitively and overlappingly at work; to hear that delicate continuous rustling, ticking, chiming,

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whistling, and stirring and teetering; the sudden soft halloo of idiotic toy-birds poking out and retiring, the tingling prick-song of unexpected music-boxes bursting into thin, airy melody—all this sort of thing is a deliciously valid allegory of the active mind itself.

\* \* \* \*

Or, if you prefer, consider the frenzy of blowing and whistling that comes wildly up Vesey Street on an evening of fog and rain, when crowded ferryboats are feeling their way back to Jersey with their high-spirited commuters. The soft and mellow threatening, pleading, of the deeper sirens; the wail and scream of tugs; the whole medley of bewildering and anguished steam-voices—with something incorrigibly humorous in effect, when heard from safe distance; and yet with a note of thrilling, simple

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urgency—here also is matter for affectionate observation.

\* \* \* \*

But Mr. Gurdjieff, we suppose, is right, if it is his idea to promote self-study and self-candour by means of his odd and arduous exercises. (Though we don't like the sound of the starchy food.) Of course, if you let the mind burn too brightly, too constantly; if you try too desperately to purge away the mere carnal, you have little but cinders left. But certainly a faithful, honest, and unflinching study of one's own heart and spirit is the only soil for literature. It is all we can trust; it is the only sand and lime and cement we can trowel into for our durable mortar. Observation and sympathy and imagination can supply the bricks; but the mortar we mix only out of our own pains and heart-blood. So, at any rate, the student meditates in moments of shame-

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less frankness; and sets down his raw and hot material, for future reboiling, scumming, fudging out in knifed criss-cross to cool in the pantry window.

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### VIII. *Outlines*

**A**N OUTLINE History of all art and all literature: That when one is completely happy, or completely miserable, he must tell someone about it.

\* \* \* \*

It is the pride and duty of the poet to keep alive the sense of strangeness; and also (as they say in the delicious world of government) to "initiate legislation." The poet drafts the legislation of the spirit, which future ages may (perhaps) write into statute. It is the suffering of the poet to hide himself from To-day that he may be companionable with To-morrow.

\* \* \* \*

## *Outlines*

Nature believed herself to have thought out everything in advance; all was nicely planned, from the unfolding of the rose to the patterned orbits of the stars. But she didn't allow for poetry, man's safety valve, for her intolerable pressure of vitality. Poetry is, at its highest, a subdivision of the sense of humour.

\* \* \* \*

Nothing is so pleasing to the inward capsule of pride and selfishness as the feeling of having been roughly treated; of having had, in the glorious phrase of common speech, a raw deal. It is often this feeling that sustains men's hearts when they contemplate the laws of the universe.

\* \* \* \*

Children whose parents quarrel are likely to be quarrelsome themselves. It is unfair to blame man too fiercely for being pugnacious; he learned the habit from Nature. And yet man's

## INWARD HO!

astonishing capacity for happiness is due to the fact that his two great parents, Art and Nature, are (at bottom) on terms of beautiful and secret understanding.

\* \* \* \*

Perhaps, therefore, man's weaknesses are due to inbreeding: Art and Nature being too closely kin.

\* \* \* \*

There are two poems of Robert Herrick's that appeal with particular charm to writers—*Not Every Day Fit for Verse*, and *The Departure of the Good Demon*. The latter goes thus:

What can I do in Poetry  
Now the good Spirit's gone from me?  
Why nothing now, but lonely sit  
And over-read what I have writ.

\* \* \* \*

One of the best brief essays I know is in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*. Let's reprint it:

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**sentiment**, n. A mental feeling, the sum of what one feels on some subject, a tendency or view based on or coloured with emotion, such feelings collectively as an influence; moving quality resulting from artist's sympathetic insight into what is described or depicted, tendency to be swayed by feeling rather than by reason, emotional weakness, mawkish tenderness or the display of it, nursing of the emotions. Expression of some desire or view esp. as formulated for a toast, &c. (*I call upon Mr. Jones for a song or a s.*). [OF, f. med. L *sentimentum* (L *sentire* feel)].

One of the most perfect comments on sentiment was that line in a letter of Charles Lamb, after the tragedy in his family: "I have something more to do than feel." So have we all. And yet perhaps the generous word has not yet been said about sentiment as a literary force. In this country, where spurious and jejune sentimentalism has probably become a more general diet than anywhere else at any time, there is room for

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enlightened sentimentalism. The word needs to be rescued from its niminy-piminy association. Enlightened sentimentalism, aerated by humour, stiffened with irony and self-mockery, but not devoid of compassion, is an ingredient too spicy to be omitted from the pantry shelf.

\* \* \* \*

It is well to be positive about such matters as Art, Literature, Criticism, Religion, and the Meaning of Life while one is in the mood; for the time may come when aphorisms (even one's own) will lose their savour. A man standing in line at the bank, hoping there is enough balance to his credit to cover the check he desires to cash, is in no frame of mind to relish abstract doctrine about the Rate of Exchange.

\* \* \* \*

We notice an announcement of publication of a book called *Studies in the*

## Outlines

*Development of the Fool in the Elizabethan Drama.* It suddenly occurs to us to ask whether any other literature has paid such affectionate attention to the "fool" as has the English. This is greatly to the credit of the English-thinking mind. The modern newspaper columnist, by the way, plays in journalism (or should play) exactly the rôle of the Fool in Shakespearean drama.

\* \* \* \*

The difficulty is that under modern conditions, where the opportunities to be sagacious, prosperous, well bred, and comfortable are so agreeably tempting, a Fool and his folly are soon parted.

\* \* \* \*

We are grateful to Stuart P. Sherman for having quoted in his book, *The Genius of America*, the following lines from Emerson:

## INWARD HO!

The world is full of renunciations and apprenticeships, and this is thine; thou must pass for a fool and a churl for a long season.

It must be remembered, however, that a renunciation is no longer a renunciation as soon as you tell people about it.

\* \* \* \*

Brief History of Journalism: "Correctly handled" (a reporter wrote us in re the arrival of Joseph Conrad in New York) "he was worth to the New York reader, through the medium of the newspapers, a column of eight-point with slugs."

\* \* \* \*

Sometimes, in a decent modesty, a natural fatigue, or a feigned jocularity, the journalist speaks lightly, flippantly, disparagingly of the business of writing. He is usually sorry afterward. Because writing, like every other specialty to which the workman

## *Outlines*

is born and nourished, is the greatest privilege, the greatest happiness and zealotry, life can afford. A pox upon those who deny it! What can better the sheer burning delight of that seizure that does sometimes come: the clear flux of words, the steady push of thought emptying itself through that magical conduit of speech, the hope of some gusto and fecundity of expression. Therein lay the manliness of the Elizabethans, they wrote because they enjoyed it: why the sheer villainy of their handwriting shows what fun they had, the words tumbling down in such golden-burning heat they halted not to mend their scrawls and quillforks. Best of all, those divine moments when (as Herrick put it) "the spirit fills The fantastick Panicles Full of fier"—when in an instant flash the whole conception lies written out in the mind: the complete inkscapè seen in one synoptic comprehend.

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These moments are too gay and too merely mental to be rendered plausible. But they do happen. Eyes that were dipped in darkness suddenly see clear: the lines (unwritten, unwritable) career joyous across the paper. Do you remember that sensation so winningly described by R. L. S.—“it seems as if it were a book you had written yourself in a dream”?

\* \* \* \*

The world, in its sheer exuberance of kindness, will try to bury the poet with warm and lovely human trivialities. It will even ask him to autograph books. But God Himself did not tarry to autograph his creation. As our friend the Mandarin observes, it was Dictated but not Signed.

## *Pre-natal Care of Poems*

### *IX. Pre-natal Care of Poems*

COMING away from Vesey Street, shortly before 5 P. M., I looked up (as always) at the Statue of Lightning. The sky was a very pale transparent blue—not pierced through with light, but a canopy holding light in level suspension; bright with that lovely pinkness that precedes sunset. On the plumes and in the wing-pits of the gilded figure brightness was strengthened to a rosy burning. Just above, a faintly glimmering new moon. Apparently near the moon—and almost as beautiful in that tender light—rode a shining scrap of waste paper, eddied up by the flotation of chance. It was poised on a toss of draught, one of those

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queer puffs of rising air that carry  
downtown jetsam so high. Just so,  
sometimes, a shred of trifling thought  
or vagabond idea, caught up in a  
hazard gust of thought, seems as  
lovely and lofty and inaccessible as  
Selene herself.

\* \* \* \*

Some day a poem will be written  
on the Pre-Natal Care of Poems.  
This is a very lovely subject. Many  
poems have to be carried in the mind  
a long time before they can be written:  
the true poet is the one who knows  
by instinct when the moment has  
come for the struggle. Poor little  
phantoms in the imagination, how  
rarely are those discarnate dreams  
properly honoured and tended by the  
expectant poet.

\* \* \* \*

No matter how sagacious or how  
revered the teacher, at some point

### *Pre-natal Care of Poems*

you will find yourself beginning to diverge from him. For sooner or later, every individual has to fall back on that residual and personal parcel of conviction which is true for himself alone. And this exceedingly sensitive and intimate possession—whether you call it Conscience or Identity or what not—can hardly be acquired, and hardly be transmitted. Some find their happiness in life by attempting to retire into this tract of singular being and enlarge it, staking off its frontiers against the rest of life. Others—the good mixers, as the eloquent phrase is—find their happiness in trying to diminish it, by cultivating the sense of solidarity and kinship with other human beings.

\* \* \* \*

Happiness requires a reasonable ratio between psychic income and psychic expenditure. If your emo-

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tional or intellectual income is insufficient to meet your expenses in the same realm, then you are bound to be overdrawn. The unluckiest insolvent in the world is the man whose expenditure of speech is too great for his income of ideas.

\* \* \* \*

There are a lot of people who must have the table laid in the usual fashion or they will not enjoy the dinner.

\* \* \* \*

Even the maddest kind of love is better than no love, no madness at all. Sometimes men grow weary of trying to hide how mad they are. We knew a Latin Quarter phrase-monger once who reduced love to the lowest possible level. He said that he loved his mistress because being with her brought such fine metaphors to his mind. This was intolerable; but still it was better than nothing.

## *Pre-natal Care of Poems*

Even a dry geranium root will survive a whole winter in the cellar and after six months mouldering in the coal-bin will still put out the most delicate new shoots. The imaginative faculty among men can only be murdered by persistent strangling.

\* \* \* \*

As human perplexity increases (and no sane man can doubt it is growing) literature, and especially fiction, plays an increasing rôle in mortal cogitation. This is due to the astounding and delicious self-absorption of human beings, which must never be forgotten by rational students of life. For the eager hunger of the ego, lifted up, draws all things to itself. In stories that are gay, amusing, potent, we like to imagine that *we* might some day be as happy or as domineering as that; in tragedies we console ourselves pitifully with the thought that at any rate things haven't been quite

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so bad in our own case. The endless craving of the ego to compare or identify all art and all creation with its own experience is the secret of every book's success or failure.

## *Catching Up with the Past*

### *X. Catching Up with the Past*

WE WERE thinking, as we came through the Pennsylvania Station, How much of one's time should one spend in trying to catch up with the Past? In the tide of hurrying legs that pushed on toward the subway, we saw a sort of mirage of someone bending over, trying frantically to pick up the spilt miscellany of a large shopping-basket—fruit, parcels, jewellery, toys, boxes of candy, and what not—trying to gather up as much of it as possible and yet not get left behind in the onward flow.

The question of dealing with the Past, we said to ourself, is just that. And, as we neared Park Place, the picture in our mind altered. It struck

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us that man stands on a kind of escalator, whose movement, for quite a number of years, he hardly notices. And then, as he becomes aware of its smooth, steady progress, he begins hastily to snatch up some of the queer jetsam left alongside by earlier passengers.

The art, of course, is to take along with you just as much of the Past as you can comfortably carry. Some people put so much of it in their pockets that they bulge and become ill at ease.

And every form of art (we continued to solipend) has a kind of material that is justly fitted for it. The speculations above, however crude, are the kind of thing that seems to us naturally adapted to the sonnet form. Just as we feel, with irresistible certainty, that there is material for a fine sonnet in the picture of Doctor Johnson on his knees in prayer—a mental picture

### *Catching Up with the Past*

that will never have deserted any sympathetic reader of that great book *The Prayers and Meditations of Doctor Johnson*.

Every established form of art has—whether you like it or not—won to itself a congeniality of material; these congenialities may, of course, be ruptured with stunning effects of surprise and novelty; yet the novelty and surprise only exist because the form itself has seemed, subconsciously, to suggest a certain kind of mood. Sonnets in slang and ribaldry, for example, have been done with prodigious delightfulness by competent artists; just as cocktails may well be served in champagne glasses. But the full humour of the experience would be lost on one who was not familiar with the ritual of serving champagne in the fragile hollow-stemmed goblet. And no artist yet has been able to make a success of

## INWARD HO!

doing a thing in the wrong way until he had somewhat grasped the notion of doing it right.

Mr. John Crowe Ransom, in a powerful essay in the *Literary Review*, said: "Probably the history of most of the abortive efforts at art is the history of wilful men who could not abandon their cause, but continued to worry it as a dog worries a bone, expecting to perform by fingers and rules what can come by magic only." Aye, indeed, gentles; it is like the lady on the tight-wire at the circus. Her beautiful performance looked so easy; and it *was* easy because she had carried her art bravely through to the point where she could *allow* it to be easy; in Ransom's phrase she had "abandoned the problem to mysterious powers within which are not the lean and laboured processes of self-conscious reason. If this abandonment is complete the oracle will speak."

### *Catching Up with the Past*

This difficult theory is valid not merely in realms of art, but in the quotidian traffic of life itself. Continually one faces the horrible matter of making decisions: whether to make a luncheon date, whether to get one's hair cut, read one of the innumerable manuscripts that publishers keep pestering one with, which letters to answer, etc., etc. The solution (we honestly believe) is, as far as possible, to avoid conscious rational decisions and choices: simply to do what you find yourself doing; to float in the great current of life with as little friction as possible; to allow things to settle themselves, as indeed they do with the most infallible certainty. In the great phrase that seemed fairly successful in the case of at least one empire, to muddle through. Is this mere casuistry? We don't think so. By "doing what you find yourself doing" we mean what you find your-

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self drifting into almost insensibly. There has been altogether too much bazoo about Will Power: the way to fool destiny is to keep your eyes averted from the things you really want; not to stare at them too fiercely; if you teach yourself painfully not to care about them you will find them (in the oddest way) beginning to pursue you.

When we consider the sickness of the mind, the heats, chills, anguishes, errors, ecstasies, that lie behind the history of poetry, we could almost wish that no more great poems should ever be written. We dislike to consider that the human heart should require to be so fiercely moved. Oh, brave, brave souls (one cries out to the poets of the past) who have endured all this for my behalf!

But this suffering is different from the general supposition. The embryology of poetry is not analogous to

### *Catching Up with the Past*

that of animal life. The poet's torment is to know when his matter is ripe for attack. In the cloudy wrack of the mind are always any number of poems in suspension: the dear bewildering visions of his spirit. It is indeed a madness; that old, old saying that poetry is close to a mania is not mere humour. If any poet (even the humblest) permitted himself to be observed in the early frenzies of conception, indeed he would be taken for imbecile or epilept. He raises angry fists toward heaven, he groans and grunts, he is the most arrant medley of misery and glee. Self-esteem and self-hatred nudge him by turns. He drees his weird.

But, if he has once learned (in Mr. Ransom's wise phrase) "*to release* his theme to the processes of imagination" he can somewhat mitigate the duration of these noble horrors. The sweating and shaking must be under-

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gone, they are needful to encyst the pearly granule in the nourishing clotted putty of the brain. But once there, he can only rely on instinct to tell him when to uproot the growing thing. Actual deposition, if he is lucky, will be not pain but rather ease and happiness.

It is ill to be too dogmatic in such matters. There are as many ways of writing a poem as there are of going to sleep. Some, by stiff process of will, are able to put themselves into the necessary trance-like state. Others, with strong coffee and uneasy ramblings of desperation, at last so weary the body that the mind clicks free and moves independent. But of every artist (all kinds) whose output was worthy the suffering it cost him, Thomas Fuller's grave words are true:

He gropeth after more light than he saw: he saw more than he durst speak of: he spake of more than he was thanked for.

### *Catching Up with the Past*

*Ah, my poor pitiable!* cries to us the voice of the poet from the page where his own troubles and ecstasies meet and blend with ours. *Ah, my poor pitiable, how can I help you? Is there naught but loneliness? Could not I suffer these pangs for you?* And we reply that he did, he has. Others he saved, himself he could not save. The only lasting treasure that mankind has is memories; and he has given us his own. Often, in one poem only, a great poet will give all his readers, through all subsequent ages, memories enough for a lifetime.

## INWARD HO!

### XI. "At Home, Four to Six"

FOUR A. M. Often, after a breathless hot night, between three and four o'clock a wind begins to move. One wakes, and listens (my window opens toward a lonely strip of woods) to that quiet varying sound in the tree-tops, not unlike the rhythm of surf. The world at that time is one I can understand: my spirit is thoroughly at home in it. I may not know what *it* means; but I know what *I* mean. Later, in the golden blaze and bustle, I find myself a dozen different creatures at once. But then I am unified, federated, *e pluribus unum*. In the excellent formula of the little engraved pasteboards, I am "At Home, Four to Six."

*"At Home, Four to Six"*

Dawn-wind in tree-tops is a thrilling murmur and stir: it gives the feeling that something is going to happen; that feeling of half-blissful, half-terrified expectancy which is the summit of life. There is just such a sense stirring in literature to-day.

For what a spirit-sickness the world has been through, these recent years. What a long, sultry night. What simian chatterings, desperate gayeties, pathetic fads and pseudo-spiritual vaudeville. The peanut-shells of thought have been industriously nibbled, but the bandar-log have forgotten to chew the kernels; or else will eat them only in the form of peanut-butter. How many literary eccentricities and sensations, "devastating" books, new magazines founded (very fine, some of them), theological squabbles, *Nie Wieder Kriegs*, *Business Builders*, ectoplasms, lecture tours, censorships, Coués, Einsteins, Gurd-

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jieffs, Fourth Dimensions, Tutankhamens, symbolic dramas, Buy-a-Book-a-Week slogans, Lists of Ten Bests, prohibitions, inhibitions, exhibitions. I lump them all together, the fine and the farcical. Sheikings, shriekings, and seekings. And behind all the tattle, what a general and pitiable and honourable uneasiness it is evidence of.

Poetry, one may be proud to say, has remained comparatively sane. (The birds are beginning in the wood outside, in the hollow darkness. I say *hollow* because their liquid clatter comes with a clear, enlarged *reflected* sound, almost with an echo, as though they were under the roof of some great chapel.) Not untouched by the general frenzy and relaxation, yet the poets have served us nobly in the main: they have kept in touch with reality: in the new spirit of angry questioning they have retained what is fine, they have tried to scuff off the

“*At Home, Four to Six*”

mere bombast. A little book like Squire's anthology, *Selections from Modern Poets*, shows plainly how honestly and beautifully they have fortified us. While bewildered statesmen were playing the goat, poets have had things to say. They have sat awake late at night, long after Pelmanists and Business Builders were snorting their fill.

That (now a pale lilac light comes sifting through open doors and windows) is perhaps the root of the matter. To take time to concentrate, to be still and intuitive long enough to see what is really interesting. Writing is never a labour, never a difficulty, if one can pause and cloister long enough to dull the dint of triviality and find out what one is really thinking. Is no one interested in *reality* (one sometimes wonders) that they're all so busy calling each other on the telephone?

## INWARD HO!

"Last night I read *A Shropshire Lad*," said a very courageously modern young woman. "I cried. What does that mean?" Well, it means that she is sane. It means that she understands the basis of literature, which is feeling, perception. I myself, after living several years in a constant stew and writing quite a number of eager words in an effort to discern what literature really means, what is the impulse and actuality behind it, humbly believe myself also beginning to comprehend. Perhaps I am reaching the point where I can begin. (Now the light is a clear, lucid pearly-greenness, like that seen by a swimmer under water.)

An observant art critic, a visitor to this country, was saying the other day that she found American landscape insignificant (in the exact sense). It seemed to her to have nothing to testify. It seemed shallow, barren,

*“At Home, Four to Six”*

bright but not translucent. (Joseph Conrad, by the way, made somewhat the same comment.) To which I replied that the continent was too large: there was only a certain amount of landscape to go round and they had to spread it very thin to cover the area. Europeans, though often too polite to admit it, are usually struck by a kind of spiritual meagreness in the American scene. Muirhead Bone said that he had to hunt a long time before he found a bit of landscape that gave him “the Edgar Allan Poe feeling.”

Perhaps this is natural; perhaps also it is partly due to European preconceptions. It needs centuries and centuries of human imagination to instil meaning and sensibility into a landscape. That is one reason why living on the northern coast of Long Island is happy: the country has an air of age and human association. One of

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the tasks of the poet is to help Nature acquire a meaning. That is one of the reasons for the fascination of the physically actual in literature. It is always satisfying to read about a definite *place*—a house, a street, a village—when you know it really exists. Things sometimes do not seem to have any spiritual existence until they have been written about. I myself, because they mean so much to me, jabber about Vesey Street, St. Paul's Churchyard, the Lightning Statue, the great pillars inside the Telephone and Telegraph Building, the old courtyard on Ann Street, a hundred other minutiae of that region, because I yearn to help them along toward that splendid significance they desire. I should like to people Long Island with poets, so that people would ride on the Oyster Bay trains caring nothing for soot, crowding, and delay, filled with pride and excitement

“*At Home, Four to Six*”

merely to see the station-names on the platforms. Those names should come to them with thrills of recognition, because poetry had mentioned them. Names that have been even only casually honoured in literature acquire meaning and wealth of association. Dean Prior, Bemerton, Concord, Salem, Walden, Windermere, Oulton, Stoke Poges, Box Hill—one can make up the list for himself. “Is this the *real* Walden?” one says to himself, seeing the name on a sign-board. He means, is it the Walden that Thoreau wrote about. There may be other Waldens (in fact, there are), but they are plainly spurious in any artistic sense. The habit (often mocked, and indeed often truly risible) that English minor poets have of tagging at the foot of each poem the name of the place where it was written, is due to an excellent instinct. The poet yearns to put *pied-à-terre*:

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to strengthen himself by contact and ligature with the fertile actual earth.

(The light outside—it is approaching 6 o'clock—is now a clear flat white, without a spark of gold. A hazy day, perhaps?)

Poems are, in a sense, the *eyes* of our Muse. One looks into them, sees their wistful loveliness, sees them darkened with sudden moods of sadness, and wonders what they are thinking of, what they would convey. Then one thinks of the pitiably scanty proportion of thought that gets expressed, even put down in roughly communicable form. O miserable ratio of the transmissions to the unuttered and only half-apprehended broodings! This is so of everyone. Consider, then, that huge world of undivulged thought, that great sea of inward fancy, exultation, yearning, in which conscious and communicated life is a mere sprinkle of atolls. This

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vastness of individual and solitary thinkings is the sky under which literature moves and from which it draws light and colour; it is the earth that nourishes the artist's dream; it is the sea along whose bending and alluring coasts we build our villages and lighthouses.

(It is 6 o'clock. I hear the Chinaman's alarm clock buzz up in the attic. Out on the lawn large robins are watchfully hopping and skimming. They pause, with absurdly indignant and suspicious air, to see me candidate on the porch in pyjamas. Behind the willow trees a flagrant orange spark burns through the leaves. Time begins again.)

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*“That One Might Almost  
Say . . .”*

A GREAT novelist, one of the greatest of our time (this, by the way, is a true story), was once visited by a friendly fellow who was of a bookish sort but not in any professional sense a “man of letters.” The novelist and his visitor went for a walk together in the country; they talked about this and that. The visitor, perhaps a little constrained by his affectionate admiration for the author, was secretly troubled by a sense of imperfect *rappport*. Their minds did not seem to meet exactly, but slithered past each other and had to be recalled. Was this going to be (the visitor wondered) like so many other keenly anticipated Moments,

*“That One Might Almost Say”*

a painful disappointment when actually experienced? Was this one of those desperately grievous passages of human maladjustment when the mind perceives a situation of grotesque absurdity which must be conducted (with decent politeness) to the nearest exit?

Then happened an astonishing thing. As they returned from their ramble, the novelist looked sharply at his anxious guest, and said: “I see that you and I are sympathetic. I see that you divine, better perhaps than any one I have known, what I have tried to do in my work. I see that you understand me very deeply. You have penetrated my secret. If there should be any necessity of any one writing about me, I wish *you* might be the one to do it.”

The visitor, not himself a trained journalist or critic, was tripartially touched, pleased, and alarmed. As,

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in succeeding years, his friendly intimacy with the novelist grew and flourished, the latter often alluded to the happy private understanding between them. But occasionally, in his heart, the other permitted himself to wonder just what it was that he was supposed to have understood.

\* \* \* \*

Now this little anecdote strikes me as a relishable parable upon literature. Life itself, or Nature, or whatever you choose to call this universal frame, seems to have a passionate yearning to be understood. With what broad gestures of invitation, and also with what subtle almost imperceptible hints and suggestions and pollicitations, she lays herself out to cajole us, to notify her eagerness. Like Mistress Elizabeth Drury, whose

Pure and eloquent blood  
Spoke in her cheeks, and so distinctly wrought,  
That one might almost say, her body thought—

*"That One Might Almost Say"*

Nature's whole complexion is one of entrancing appeal. And so, even though we only catch her sense at two removes, we all, scientists, philosophers, theologians, painters, poets, according to the measure of our individual hardihood, pursue her in our own ways. How many, many enigmatic nudges she gives us: how slow we are to follow them up. How many thunderstorms circled the globe in gold and purple before man saw what she was driving at—offering us the subway, the telephone, the radio! What was it Walt Whitman said?—"I find letters from God dropt in the street."

Let us say then (even if only for the sake of argument: which is the greatest of intellectual sakes) that Nature pines to be understood. One of her errors of judgment, perhaps, was to have terrified her urchin too thoroughly. She gave primitive man a

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pretty bad scare: only now, after all these thousand generations, we begin to outgrow those inherited quavers. To the poet she speaks with a specially winning voice. She persuades him that he, he particularly, understands her. Of course this may be just another of her cunning stratagems. But even if all her lovelinesses are tricks, at least that implies a Trickster? She turns on the poet her clear grave regard, and says that in him, at last, she has found a kinsprit. He, he indeed (so he believes he hears her murmur!), has grasped her mystery. And if any one is to write about her, he is the one.

Sometimes I think she did that once too often. She said it to Walt Whitman, and he took her at her word. In Walt, fragments of truth escaped that perhaps she had hardly intended to get out. Poets are dangerous people to intrust with secrets.

*“That One Might Almost Say”*

But perhaps that is just why Nature tells them so many.

(And yet the whole gist of Walt Whitman had escaped at least once before; at a time when the Pandora's hope-chest of literature flew wide open and so much got out. I mean, of course, in the seventeenth century. There is a line of Ben Jonson's, in his poem to the Lady Venetia Digby, that is a seed from which whole acres of Leaves of Grass might well spring—

What makes these tiffany, silkes, and lawne,  
Embroideries, feathers, fringes, lace,  
*When every limbe takes like a face!*

I italicize the line for the meditation of Whitmanians.

Of course the difference between Ben and Walt—the two greatest poets, I suppose, who are always spoken of by their first names—was that what was to the Elizabethan only a witty conceit, was by Walt

## INWARD HO!

taken quite seriously. Where the Elizabethan was content to put up a charmingly lettered finger-post—saying perhaps COVENTRY, 10 Miles—the modern poet insists on walking the whole way, to be sure whether the town is really there.

(But all this is only a parenthesis; the idea struck me as so enchanting I couldn't wait to put it down.)

So the poet, in his moments of private excitement, has this inward assure that he and Truth are in secret sympathy. This does not necessarily mean happiness. Men must be pathetic before they can be sympathetic.

\* \* \* \*

I wonder, incidentally, whether you have really dug into Walt's *Song of Myself*. I wonder whether *I* have? "The dirt receding before my prophetic screams." . . . "I am given up by traitors, I talk wildly,

*"That One Might Almost Say"*

I have lost my wits, I and nobody else am the greatest traitor". . . .

"I am stucco'd with quadrupeds and birds all over". . . . "he that by me spreads a wider breast than my own proves the width of my own". . . .

"Shoulder your duds, dear son, and I will mine, and let us hasten forth"

. . . . "My words itch at your ears till you understand them."

What an evening William Blake would have had with *Leaves of Grass*.

Has the absolute essence of Walt's achievement been stated? He abolished loneliness. No one need ever be lonely again if he is capable of reading Whitman. If he is not capable, then he hasn't done enough thinking to be in danger of solitude. That, after all, is one of the honours of the poet: to reduce the sum total of loneliness. Keats said in one of his letters: "I never quite despair, and I read Shakespeare."

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Walt's obeisance to science (e. g., section 23 of *Song of Myself*) was usually a trifle humorous; but it was genuine. Walt was shrewd enough to perceive that poetry is really an extension or excurrency of the scientific spirit. Science is an attempt to do the possible and to push out the frontiers of the fact; poetry is an attempt to do the impossible, and also an attempt so graceful that it will almost appear to have been done. But it is an attempt conducted in the honourable spirit of mathematics or chemistry. Poetry seeks to apply the utmost rigour of accuracy and apprehension to matters which are, of their nature, immeasurable, evanescent, impalpable. The poet passes the small sieve of his mind through an opaque fog: a fog which at its most luminous is not more than pearly: and in that mesh adhere bright-shining drops and globules. This is as close as he can ever come to

“*That One Might Almost Say*”

examining the nature of that fog, bead by clear bead. So where the poet is distinctly inferior to the scientist is in the (probably irrelevant) matter of good cheer. The scientist is happy, I dare say, because he does sometimes succeed: he discovers some formula absolutely valid in itself; composes some machine that he can see working. Like the verbs *utor*, *fruor*, *fungor*, *potior*, and *vescor* (if I remember the Latin grammar) he governs the ablative: he is effective in expressing agency, instrumentality, achievement. But the poet never succeeds. I myself, staying indoors on a fine Sunday morning to write this piece, am far from happy, punctuated by sudden pangs lest these shades and divisions of scrutiny are not, after all, either useful or worth attempt.

Poe said that there is no such thing as a long poem. I would go further and fare worse: there is not even such a

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thing as a finished poem, complete in itself. I tried to intimate this once by calling a piece of three stanzas "A Poem in Four Stanzas"; my idea being that the reader should supply the fourth in his own mind, applying the meditation to himself. And lo, how I was belaboured with letters (and even telegrams of exult) for my supposed carelessness. But art is communication: it requires not merely a sender but also a recipient. A poem is a marriage service, prescriptive for the imagined union of a mind and a mood. It is never complete until it is performed in the spirit of some destined reader—for whom, indeed, it may wait long at the altar. This intimate complication of poem and reader is not sufficiently understood. When the two really mate, they grow side by side. For instance, Whitman's *Song of Myself*, once seminated in the mind, grows there continually. Whenever

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you return to it, you discover something new: both you and it, in your mutual relation, are more capacious than when you last encountered. Poetry deals with essences that are perpetually in motion: at the very start the poet verifies that dream of mediæval science. The mind is the true *primum mobile*. And the poet, at his best, deals not in materials available for mere pleasure or contentment. His transaction is in those pains and yearnings which, when understandingly shared, are more thrilling than happiness.

\* \* \* \*

Melville truly said that all beautiful things are touched with melancholy; and perhaps the preceding sounds a little gloomy. It need not be so construed. I have said that poetry is a subdivision of the sense of humour; by which I mean it is an exercise of those same faculties of

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observation, comparison, analogy, surprising and confounding association, which are the meat of laughter. The unknown genius who first called brickbats "Irish confetti" was a poet of high creative energy. Indeed the eccentric antics of a poet in his heat of composition might well be mistaken for the rehearsings of a clown. The greater the poet, the more likely is some stroke of mirth or even ribaldry to come flashing in. Bernard Shaw, and many others, too, have pointed to the terrific voltage of Shakespeare's comic spirit: bursting out (amid the agonizing Dark Lady sequence, the real World's Series) with such wretched punning as sonnet 135; such bath-house humour as sonnet 130; such gruesome carnal mockery as sonnet 151; "Is it not clear," Shaw says in the preface to his own *Dark Lady of the Sonnets*, "that to the last there was in Shakespeare an incorrigible

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divine levity, an inexhaustible joy that derided sorrow?" Shaw having often told us that if he had been born in 1556 instead of 1856 he would have given Shakespeare "a harder run for his money than all the other Elizabethans put together," we may accept his word as authoritative. (Although Shakespeare did not find it necessary to write prefaces longer than the plays themselves to explain what they were about.)

If you care to examine a similar alternation of mood in a contemporary Elizabethan, consider another sonnet series that one naturally brackets by colour scheme with Shakespeare's to *Black Beauty*. Don Marquis's *Sonnets to a Red-Haired Lady* contain the kind of japes that archangels whisper to one another under the covert of an uplifted opaline wing, lest any of the new-arriving blest should overhear. But then give particular heed

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to the last four pieces, where, after so many celestial vulgarities, the poet rises suddenly into grave beauty and sobriety.

“Poetry,” said Shelley, “lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar.” This, if you substitute ‘absurdity’ for ‘beauty,’ is also a good definition of humour. Mr. Chaplin has made the most familiar objects in the world—elderly shoes and trousers—something exceedingly rich and strange. Humour is perhaps a sense of intellectual perspective: an awareness that some things are really important, others not; and that the two kinds are most oddly jumbled in every-day affairs. It is just this same sense of affectionate (or indignant) amazement which is the beginning of poetry. Every human spirit is condemned, a great part of the time, to solitary confine-

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ment; but it is confined in a kind of telephone cell where communication *is* possible with others far away, in time or space. And in this imprisonment and stress, the spirit of protesting laughter rises as naturally as the steam that gathers on the window of a telephone booth where a warm-blooded creature is struggling to get a long-distance connection.

\* \* \* \*

You rise early in the morning and go outdoors to make a before-breakfast circuit of the house and snuff the garden air ingrained with gold. But though you think yourself taking the day by the prime, it is already old to the birds. Their airy brawling, reduplicated chirrup and tweetling, their almost crazy jargoneering, has been going on for hours. So it is in the tree-tops of the mind. However delicious to yourself these musings about poetry, all has been said before.

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This, then, is perhaps the sovereign tribute to poetry, that though you may have read all the argument from Sir Philip Sidney down to Santayana and Sandburg, yet you are still driven to formulate your happiness for yourself. This is not easy. Like John Donne at his prayers,

Sometimes I finde that I had forgot what I was about, but when I began to forget it, I cannot tell. A memory of yesterdays pleasures, a feare of to morrows dangers, a straw under my knee, a noise in mine eare, a light in mine eye, on any thing, a nothing, a fancy, a chimera in my braine, troubles me in my prayer.

The sense of poetry is closely akin to that absent-mindedness. Poetry might almost be defined as what you are really thinking about when you believe yourself to be thinking of something else. It is a wash of quicksilver at the back of the mind, which

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turns that window into a mirror. The modern interest in the so-called psychology of the unconscious is nothing new to the poet. He knows, as Shakespeare and Wordsworth did, that the mystery of his traffic is a sleep and a forgetting. There is little in the way of symbolism, oneiromancy, or subliminal psyches that was not pretty bluffly hinted at in the old Border Ballads, where simple art deals so cuttingly with essential emotions and terrors. Sleep is surely more important than we dared admit: else why would the every-morning struggle to wake, to climb back up the sliddery glacier-notches of consciousness, be so agonizing?

It was a sleep  
So dark and so bewilderingly deep  
That only death's were deeper or completer,  
And none when I awoke stranger or sweeter.  
Awake, the strangeness still hung over me  
As I with far-strayed senses stared at the light.

## INWARD HO!

Strange—yet stranger I.  
And as one climbs from water up to land  
Fumbling for weedy steps whereon to climb  
To this remote and new-struck isle of time.

(JOHN FREEMAN, "Waking.")

\* \* \* \*

The poet is not to be condemned,  
rather pitied, for his furious egotism.

Cries the poet every day:

*Ego, mei, mihi, me!*

But this burning expansion of the First Person Singular is, in his passion, somehow universalized and purged. It is "to airy thinness beat." Still, "Me is a touchy creature, chained near I." That being so, it is not surprising that the poet can do little with his fiery matter until it has cooled to bearable touch. "Emotion recollected in tranquillity" is the classic phrase. The poet's attitude toward his emotions is not unlike that of a parent to young children. He rarely sentimentalizes them until they are

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safely and silently abed. On foot and alert, they are too wildly, maddeningly active.

So the poet feels his material all about him. He floats in consciousness, a naked swimmer completely and lucidly embraced in that perilous buoyancy. And even from that level immersion he can see blue coast-line, as a bather at Cold Spring Harbour sees Connecticut across Long Island Sound. Poetry is to the mind what Connecticut is to Long Islanders. We know it is there, even though we rarely attain it.

But the poet is not only aware of his material: he has the most curious feeling that it has already been selected for him. Whether by his trained instinct, or his subconscious mind, or by lonely Nature in her coming-on disposition, it seems to have been edited for his golden moment and passion. Life lies before

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him strangely like an anthology; and the double charm of a good anthology is that it not merely offers us beautiful verse; it also, by its arrangement and inclusions, gives a precious inlook upon the mind of the compiler. Then let us terminate meditations which can never be concluded by merely hinting that poetry and religion are the same. It astonishes me to reflect that Shelley was considered an "atheist." For even though our philosophy may not have passed beyond the pata-cake stage, poets remember that both Jesus and Pegasus were born in a stable.

## *The Arch of Nothingness*

### *XIII. The Arch of Nothingness*

I MET the Devil last night. It was exactly three minutes past midnight. He said: "After all, what does it matter whether you write it or not? Why not go to bed?"

\* \* \* \*

It requires more hardihood to tell the truth in prose than in poetry. A certain extravagance is conceded to poets: surprising sentiments are condoned (or ignored) when expressed in good verse. For this reason many are content to utter their indignations in rhyme; which gives them the relief of expression without the embarrassment of being apprehended.

\* \* \* \*

Too large a proportion of literary criticism is written by people who are

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deliciously naïf and solemn, who have seen little of life as it is actually transacted and have insufficiently pondered what they have seen. Their ears have been so deafened by the clamour of print that they have forgotten to listen to the beating of their own hearts. Many agreeable and influential book reviewers seem almost unaware how human beings really behave. Someone should borrow money from them, send a resolute insurance agent to visit them, or in some other lively fashion acquaint them with the seamy side of life.

\* \* \* \*

Praise is pleasant: if only it didn't make one so humble; hostility is painful: if only it didn't make one so proud.

\* \* \* \*

There is much great writing being done; there would be still more if we were not (most of us) so eager to be

## *The Arch of Nothingness*

safely and mannerly mediocre, which is a difficult, austere ambition. It requires inordinate valour and recklessness to do the easiest thing: to set down the untinctured matter of the heart. What men really think goes mostly into letters and privy journals; and they console themselves for indiscretion by thinking that at any rate it won't be published (if at all) until they themselves are out of print. They prefer not to spill the beans; only the has-beens. Yet, if one could write every line as though for posthumous issue only, what fun, what fun! And if one did, it would become posthumous much sooner.

\* \* \* \*

For it is literature of the secret sort—letters, diaries, notebooks—that is the most fascinating: those private testaments where you catch human beings off guard and speaking without fear of being understood. I need

## INWARD HO!

only mention Butler's *Notebooks*; or the odd little *Notebook of Anton Chekhov*. This latter caused me to meditate that perhaps this whole world as we know it is merely the notebook of some Demiurge: each of us is a jotted memorandum of some story or character the Gifted Author intended (perhaps still intends?) some day to work out. And that is the cause of all human restlessness: we are hunting about hungrily for the rest of the story in which we belong.

\* \* \* \*

We had spoken stammeringly, it is true; and yet wisely, understandingly, hopefully; we had escaped clean across the frontier of Time. Then I felt a change: looking at you, I saw your eye had chanced upon the clock. You began to speak automatic politenesses, suavities without meaning. We were back in Time.

\* \* \* \*

## *The Arch of Nothingness*

I have not discharged my payments  
to Eternity; but, in that odd phrase  
that I have never quite understood,  
I have an "equity" in it.

\* \* \* \*

Your face is pleasantly familiar;  
but I can't quite seem to remember  
your name. . . .

My name, he replied, is Death.

\* \* \* \*

Literature is of several kinds.  
Sometimes it is intended to amuse, to  
inform, to distract, to reprove; but  
occasionally it attempts also to convey  
that strange solitude and homesick-  
ness that is the glory and distress  
of the human spirit.

\* \* \* \*

Every human being is painfully  
aware of his own paradoxes, his piti-  
ful shortcomings. Consequently, with  
those who also know these details too  
well he is shy about uncovering his

## INWARD HO!

soul. This is why the smoking car is Babbitt's confessional.

\* \* \* \*

Poetry must be lived before it can either be written or properly understood. And that is why the enjoyment of poetry is essentially a feeling of recognition: the recognition of something you thought you had forgotten, or were hardly aware that you had once noticed.

\* \* \* \*

I opened a door in my mind, and in an unexpected polygon of mirrors I saw a dozen reduplicated selves, all, though different, mocking cartoons of me. With shouts of incredulous laughter they greeted one another.

\* \* \* \*

I suffer fools gladly; for I have always been on good terms with myself.

\* \* \* \*

The highbrow critic wrote a darkly eloquent and gloomy piece about

## *The Arch of Nothingness*

destiny, truth, and fidelity to literary art. Then he went out to lunch. Sitting at the next table, I heard him yelping with laughter.

\* \* \* \*

I, who offend a hundred times a week, sometimes worry whether those against whom I trespass will ever condone my errors. Then I am comforted, remembering that even I have also forgiven much.

\* \* \* \*

But should I call a caucus of my different selves, who would serve as chairman?

\* \* \* \*

If the world knows your address, you are doomed.

\* \* \* \*

Resign yourself to this: that your purest intentions and attempts, your most honourable strugglings toward virtue and honour, will be annotated

## INWARD HO!

against you as indisputable evidence of your baseness and perversity.

\* \* \* \*

There was a child four years old who went to the hospital to have her adenoids and tonsils out. And, waiting in the little chamber outside the operating room, gradually the strangeness of the scene, the white gowns, the smell of drugs, the hissing of some medical engine beyond the door, crept upon her nerves. She was frightened, and clung to the one she knew best. Then came a large, cheerful doctor with brawny bare arms, to give the anæsthetic. "Hullo, Tommy!" he said, with calculated shrewdness. "I'm not Tommy!" she cried, all her furious feminine soul rising to the insult. And her protest against this outrage so occupied her mind that it kept her thoughts busy right down to the sill of oblivion.

There is a parable here. Give us

## *The Arch of Nothingness*

some grievance, some burning obsession, some excellent indignation, to keep us happily busy under the very arch of nothingness.

\* \* \* \*

When people die, I suppose someone has to go through their pockets, to straighten things out. I was just thinking, suppose my mind died this afternoon, and some gravely friendly person went through it, what would he find in its pockets? A lot of little familiar shining trinkets, I dare say, that I had forgotten were there, or had grown so used to I never looked at them. Oh, yes, and some quite new bright oddities also. And a few favourite and well-rubbed puns that I had relished.

Let's see if I can guess what he would find in those pockets. Well, perhaps the shimmer of some rainy streets at night; the falling toll of the Metropolitan chimes eddying down

## INWARD HO!

over Gramercy Park on a spring morning; the roaring croon of a steam calliope; Oxford bells heard through the dark; a golden figure of Lightning seen, on gusty winter days, through a speckled window-pane; the white figures of cricketers on a green scutum of Pennsylvania turf; a round-towered castle on a hilltop in Germany, where (at the age of seven) I first tasted beer—and hated it; sunset light dustily slanting through the alcoves of a college library; the “silver shock” of water when you dive naked into it; a sand-spit on Lake Champlain under a steep bluff crowned with grieving pines. . . . But why catalogue? The list is too long, and the intellectual coroner would grow impatient. Here, he would cry, open the window and let’s get rid of this junk.

*Prepare to Meet with Caliban*

*XIV. Prepare to Meet with  
Caliban*

EVERY vigilant observer knows (in his own life or his friends') confections of comedy, outrages of tragedy, refinements of surprise, which exceed anything literature has dared to portray. Perhaps the rich utility of the art is to remind us of what we have already learned or surmised. Literature, said a charming editorial in the *London Times* not long ago, is "complete statement." The beneficence of great writers is that they seize our pitiable little groping thoughts and visions, amplify and complete them; and from the vantage of their fiercer, fuller, more humane purview of life they satisfy us by in-

## INWARD HO!

telligibly expressing what we had just begun to suspect. We were learning to add; and, in a burst of delight, they showed us how to multiply.

\* \* \* \*

Literature, then, completes and dignifies our emotional life; but it is only a commentary: it is not life itself. Wordsworth's famous line about books being "a substantial world" sounds rather dubious. No matter how stoutly you pretend, literature proves but a pale consoler in times of hunger and stress. It is as lovely as moonlight, but it is outdoors the little dark dwelling of the mind, where the spirit feels its way cannily, like a man in his own house at night. "I comfort myself with words," says the mind: and contemplates the symbols it deems apt. *Calmness, Courage, Friendship, Peace*—such words, in clean italic letters, it sets down for sedatives: and is grieved to find them

### *Prepare to Meet with Caliban*

no medicine at all. "Courage is a noble word," says the lonely heart to herself—"But where is his hand that once lay on my breast?" Ah! poor realist, such are matters that require counsellors more slow and sure of tread. What a wise instinct it was to call Time "Father." He is indeed paternal: this is He that shall tuck us all in bed at last, and there most restless urchins find their endless peace.

\* \* \* \*

For words (said some wise one), though the coins of literature, are only the counters of science: or, as we may revise, only the counters of Life. And when Life hunts men hard, literature makes a moonlight flitting. "Argue it not," cries Heart: "this happened to none other, nor did I read it in a book. This is different. It happened to Me! And the precedents, even if there were any, do not apply."

## INWARD HO!

There are no precedents: You are the first You that ever was.

\* \* \* \*

Yet those who have lived a number of years in level country grow hungry for mountains. Imagine one who had spent his whole career on a flat plain and had never lifted his eyes toward hills; or ears that had heard only the tinsmith clatter of dance-hall music, never the deep voice of an organ trembling the whole cave of air. Such is the case of the infinitely large majority who have lived without any conception of the meaning and service of literature: whose only fodder is the current fiction and magazines and newspapers. These so enormously outnumber the few whose instinct leads them back to the nourishment of great books that it would be pitiable snobbery to pretend that the bibliophiles alone have discovered some lovely mystery and happiness

### *Prepare to Meet with Caliban*

occult from simpler men. The truth is that every lucky soul has discovered a secret none other is likely to guess. This secret is himself. If he knows what makes him happy, whether gardening or radio tinkering or betting on horses, then he is an artist and must be let alone. To be unhappy is shabby enough; but there is a misdemeanour more vulgar still: to insist upon other people being happy in my way.

\* \* \* \*

Nothing, therefore, is more diverting to the mind than the cliques and jealousies and waves of fashion among poets and critics. These small turmoils are not only amusing to contemplate; they should be deliberately stirred up now and again in the interest of the Comic Spirit and to prevent readers from taking the literary tribe too seriously. For these trifles, if taken with a grain of Epsom salts, are excellently hilarious, laxative to

## INWARD HO!

the spirit, and flush the system for a reapplication to affairs that really matter. The debility of literary historians has always been that they denatured the writers they dealt with and made them less real than marble. It is sorry enough to be the victim of a legend and an epitaph during life; but at any rate while a man lives he has some chance to show himself arterial. Once dead he can be misemphasized *ad lib.* Shakespeare's diary, had he kept one, would probably have topsy-turved the whole world of letters. A mind too proud to unbend over the small *ridiculosa* of life is as painful as a library with no trash in it. There must always be a shelf of detective stories and desert-insular romances for after-supper dissolution.

\* \* \* \*

But it is a sound instinct not to impart the truth to those who will take

### *Prepare to Meet with Caliban*

it too hard. Life must often be read not as straightaway text, but as an acrostic.

\* \* \* \*

Speaking of desert islands: John Masefield, in his charming but dogmatic little book on Shakespeare, rather mocks the idea that *The Tempest* is an allegory. But why not? Maugre J. M., we have still a taste for imagining the island with its thousand twangling instruments, its insubstantial pageant, its midnight mushrooms, a pretty gloss of the poet's own mind. Every mind has its own Ariel, its own Caliban; and though Caliban is generally thought of as the poor brutish natural, in terror of his master's voice and store of pinches, yet this is not all. There is one line—

We must prepare to meet with Caliban—that seems by context and in the gravity of its utterance to show that the crisis was not easy. Also the

## INWARD HO!

sad little epilogue—"My ending is despair"—which we are told to accept as Shakespeare's last public word, enforces the final truth: that all art, however great, is vain unless it meets hearts that understand it. Every artist must "prepare to meet with Caliban"; lucky if he has so diligent an Ariel.

Yes: *The Tempest* seems to remain as a wistful fable of the artist's internecine selves. One feels all the more certain that Prospero stands attorney for the whole world of writers: for having hit upon a phrase that tickled him, he made haste to use it again (The "deeper than e'er plummet sounded" line). Who originated the quaintly misleading saying "Shakespeare never repeats"? And certainly he, more than any other man, was the cause of repetition in others.

The most curious oddity about *The*

### *Prepare to Meet with Caliban*

*Tempest* was one which Mr. Masfield, as a seaman, might well have remarked: the lamentable fact that throughout the marine disaster and reconditioning the master of the vessel has practically nothing to say. Yet the skipper was a spirited fellow, for he "capered" with pleasure when his ship was magically repaired. But it is the gallows-faced bosun who gives tongue. Bosuns have usually been great talkers; though not when the captain is by. Still, we are told that this bosun was born to be hanged.

## INWARD HO!

### *XV. Sudation Frustrated; and Stella's Image Omitted*

A CRITIC is one who deals with crises. The crises he knows most about are those of his own spirit. He will be most valuable to us if he begins by giving a synopsis of himself. "One becomes typical by being to the utmost degree one's self." This I find in the preface to Havelock Ellis's enthralling book *The Dance of Life*.

So I resolve that in the general babble about literature, I will try to hang onto that simple meaning of the word *critic*. It is queer how words keep attempting to slip out of their senses. A hermit is someone who lives in a desert. If there is one place in the world that is undeserted, it is

### *Sudation Frustrated*

Times Square (which isn't even a square, by the way); and just on the edge of that area is a café calling itself a *Hermitage*. The paradox is so agreeable that I really must go there for lunch.

\* \* \* \*

Ah, how happy if one could feel certain of putting into effect that great doctrine that living itself should be an art. (See Havelock Ellis's chapter on "The Art of Morals.") But life seems an awkwardly inductile medium. It isn't homogeneous: now it runs thin and meagre, now it clots and strings. Too much turps, too much turpitude. The painful contradictions of the old Greek epitaph are ever-present in the artist's mind, they numb his fingers—

*I, who loved Beauty, was not beautiful:  
I cherished Truth and yet I was not  
true;*

## INWARD HO!

*I, who remembered, am so soon forgotten—*

*But I loved you.*

*I, who praised Mirth, was well acquainted with sorrow;*

*I honoured Freedom, yet I was not free;*

*But once indeed I knew the just equation—*

*For you loved me.*

So we ask of the critic that he prepare himself to deal judiciously not merely with the mimetic and factitious crises of literature but with the actual crises of life (as Havelock Ellis does in that remarkable book.) The very word *crises* has, to all eyes and ears, a vital colour and sound. That is not surprising, as we use it chiefly in referring to politics and disease.

\* \* \* \*

## *Sudation Frustrated*

For literature, in some moods, is a very hollow voice. What is the virtue and service of a book? Only to help me to a more genuine realization of myself, to live less gingerly and shabbily. If it has done that, away with it; I have no wish to see it again. Sometimes, late at night, I see the damned things stacked up in tormenting rows, mere bricks of paper, and say I'd throw them all into the furnace gladly for the kingdom and power and glory of pouring out my own heart. They are only useful as a consolation for that stark dumbness and terror that comes upon one phiz-a-phiz with life itself.

\* \* \* \*

So the greatest treachery the critic can commit is that of acting the poor pitiable pontiff: of feigning certainty. For all our fine words, we are (every now and then) lonely, frightened children: it is very dark under the

## INWARD HO!

trees. Even immortality (whatever that may mean) is a negative word: a word of terror. All crave, indeed, to make their living show the quality of art: but we have only one sketch block, and the charcoal is bad to erase. A wise and decent shame withholds us from too mercilessly admitting our secret shinings: we fear that these moments of pure feeling can best be experienced alone. Others, very likely, prefer to pursue them their own way. Some very meaning secret, perhaps, resides in this horrid bliss of solitude. Truth, which some like to call by an even auguster name, admits callers one by one. "When I met God," said the Oriental mystic, "it was just like being alone."

It is in such matters as these that we come to the critics for aid and comfort. Their pronouncements had been so assured, we thought perhaps . . .

### *Sudation Frustrated*

But they were critics of literature,  
not of life.

\* \* \* \*

Yet man has much the best of it, indeed, far more fun than mountains and mice. What innocent pleasure in setting down his ponders in black serpentines of ink; then inventing types, to give himself the excitement of rereading them. Once in a while, too, he does shoot an arrow a long way. A little Syracusan coin with its winged horse and wheatsheaf and sickle, now stamped again every week (some fistful of centuries later) as the emblem of the *Literary Review*—indeed an obol in the hand of Charon, one might say, if not fearing to be misconceived by the most amiable of editors. Superior to the animals in his divine capacity for self-torment, man is at least their equal in wise and happy moments of tranquillity: when the fury of his conflicting desires is

## INWARD HO!

mercifully stilled, when he contemplates the rich world in delighted curiosity. He can think of a wind-jammer at sea in moonlight, living and white as a dogwood tree. He can hear that bending creak and sway, and even thank his stars he is not there himself to be stricken by such painful completeness of beauty. Such loveliness, he says to himself, could not be borne . . . and yet it must be. That is the critic's duty perhaps: to bear the full impact of beauty and make it tolerable for the rest of us. . . . Isn't it a bit odd, sometimes, how little of that beauty he seems to think we can stand?

\* \* \* \*

With my hand on the doorknob, it occurs to me that if there had been a frontispiece in this little book, I should like it to have been Dürer's engraving of Saint Jerome in his study. How delightful it is! The

### *Sudation Frustrated*

bald-headed old anchorite deep in scrivening; the equally bald (but unhaloed) skull on the window-ledge; the table bare save for crucifix and inkpot (but why is the ink on the *left* side, where, to dip the quill, the Saint's long trailing sleeve must smear over the wet manuscript?); the cushions (rather a lot of cushions for a solitary ascete); the scissors and memoranda tucked into loops on the wall; and, of course, the sleeping dog and lion in the foreground.

It means, I suppose, that immersion in studies puts to slumber the dog of Meanness and the lion of Passion. You'll notice, however, that the lion is not so sound asleep as the dog.

\* \* \* \*

And then, perhaps, there falls (as on Saint Jerome's blinking lion) a sudden weariness, final as death itself. Something yields and swoons

## INWARD HO!

in the mind. All these dear niceties  
are blanked in mist, recede to their  
proper insignificance.

Come, Sleep; O Sleep! The certain knot of  
peace,

The bating-place of wit. . . .

Thou shalt in me,  
Livelier than elsewhere, Stella's image see.

But while you're about it, Sleep,  
we differ from Sir Philip in this: to-  
night we can even get along without  
Stella's image. We've chosen our  
epitaph for the evening—what the  
students at Leyden write on the walls  
of the examination-room when they  
suspect they've flunked—*Hic Su-  
davit, Sed Frustra!*

## *Appendix*

### *Appendix*

*[Being a brief and rigorous anthology of comments on kindred matters. I have asked the publisher to include several blank pages after these, so that you may fill in favourite excerpts from your own reading.]*

The work is done, and from the fingers fall  
The bloodwarm tools that brought the labour  
thro:

The tasking eye that overrunneth all  
Rests, and affirms there is no more to do.  
Now the third joy of making, the sweet flower  
Of blessed work, blooming in godlike spirit;  
Which whoso plucketh holdeth for an hour  
The shrivelling vanity of mortal merit.

And thou, my perfect work, thou'rt of to-day;  
To-morrow a poor and alien thing wilt be,  
True only should the swift life stand at stay:  
Therefore farewell, nor look to bide with me.

## APPENDIX

Go find thy friends, if there be one to love thee:  
Casting thee forth, my child, I rise above thee.

—Robert Bridges (*The Growth of Love*).

\* \* \* \*

“Well, Francis,” we said to himself, sitting in a back room in Fulton Street, “do you ever write any prose?”

“Oh, no,” he said; “poetry is what comes to you, but in prose you’ve got to know what you’re doing.”

—Interview with Francis Carlin.

\* \* \* \*

Poetry is the voice of the solitary man. The poet is always a solitary; and yet he speaks to others—he would win their attention. Thus it follows that every poem is a social act done by a solitary man. And being an alien from the strange land of the solitary, he cannot be expected to admonish or to sermonize, or uplift, as it is called; and so take part in the cabals and intrigues in other lands of which he knows nothing, being himself a stranger from a strange land, the land of the solitary. People listen to him as they would to any other traveler come from distant countries and all he asks for is courtesy even as he himself is courteous.

Inferior poets are those who forget their dignity—and, indeed, their only chance of

## *Appendix*

being permitted to live—and to make friends try to enter into the lives of the people whom they would propitiate, and so become teachers and moralists and preachers. And soon for penalty of their rashness and folly they forget their own land of the solitary, and its speech perishes from their lips. The traveller's tales are of all the most precious, because he comes from a land—the poet's solitude—which no other feet have trodden and which no other feet will tread.

—J. B. Yeats.

\* \* \* \*

The simple imaginative mind may have its rewards in the repetition of its own silent working coming continually on the spirit with a fine suddenness.

—Keats, letter to Bailey.

\* \* \* \*

Poetry should strike the reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a remembrance.

—Keats, letter to John Taylor.

\* \* \* \*

We read fine things, but never feel them to the full until we have gone the same steps as the author.

—Keats, letter to Reynolds.

\* \* \* \*

## APPENDIX

Poetry must work out its own salvation in a man: It cannot be matured by law and precept, but by sensation and watchfulness . . . In *Endymion*, I leaped headlong into the sea, and thereby have become better acquainted with the soundings, the quicksands, and the rocks, than if I had stayed upon the green shore, and piped a silly pipe, and took tea and comfortable advice.

—Keats, letter to James Hessey.

\* \* \* \*

Some think me middling, others silly, others foolish. . . . I am content to be thought all this because I have in my own breast so great a resource.

—Keats, letter to George and Georgiana.

\* \* \* \*

Poetry is the journal of a sea animal living on land, wanting to fly the air.

—Carl Sandburg.

\* \* \* \*

People do not ask painters to go to places and paint pictures for nothing, but they are forever trying to graft entertainment off of poets.

—Don Marquis.

\* \* \* \*

## Appendix

The vision of Christ that thou dost see  
Is my vision's greatest enemy.

Thine has a great hook nose like thine;

Mine has a snub nose like to mine.

—William Blake.

\* \* \* \*

Nightingales sing onely some moneths in the  
spring, but commonly are silent when they  
have hatch'd their egges, as if their mirth were  
turned into care for their young ones.

—Thomas Fuller, *Of Marriage*.

\* \* \* \*

While all melts under our feet, we may well  
catch at any exquisite passion, or any contribu-  
tion to knowledge that seems by a lifted  
horizon to set the spirit free for a moment,  
or any stirring of the senses, strange dyes,  
strange colours, and curious odours, or work  
of the artist's hands, or the face of one's friend.  
Not to discriminate every moment some pas-  
sionate attitude in those about us, and in the  
brilliancy of their gifts some tragic dividing of  
forces on their ways, is, on this short day of  
frost and sun, to sleep before evening.

—Walter Pater.

\* \* \* \*

All that people sincerely believe in must be  
true; it may be differently expressed but it

## APPENDIX

cannot be a lie, and therefore if it presents itself to me as a lie, that only means that I have not understood it.

. . . I wish to understand in such a way that everything that is inexplicable shall present itself to me as being necessarily inexplicable, and not as being something I am under an arbitrary obligation to believe.

—Tolstoy, *A Confession*.

\* \* \* \*

Intellectual over-indulgence is the most gratuitous and disgraceful form which excess can take, nor is there any the consequences of which are more disastrous.

—Samuel Butler, *Notebooks*.

\* \* \* \*

Feeling is an art and, like any other art, can be acquired by taking pains. The analogy between feelings and words is very close. Both have their foundation in volition and deal largely in convention; as we should not be word-ridden so neither should we be feeling ridden; feelings can deceive us; they can lie; they can be used in a non-natural, artificial sense; they can be forced; they can carry us away; they can be restrained.

—Samuel Butler, *Notebooks*.

\* \* \* \*

## Appendix

I like a look of agony,  
Because I know it's true;  
Men do not sham convulsion,  
Nor simulate a throe.

—Emily Dickinson.

\* \* \* \*

Anger is one of the sinews of the soul; he  
that wants it hath a maimed mind.

Be not mortally angry with any for a venial  
fault. He will make a strange combustion in  
the state of his soul, who at the landing of  
every cockboat sets the beacons on fire.

—Thomas Fuller, *Of Anger*.

\* \* \* \*

Is it no verse except enchanted groves  
And sudden arbours shadow course-spunne  
lines?

Must purling streams refresh a lover's loves?  
Must all be vail'd, while he that reades  
divines,  
Catching the sense at two removes?

—George Herbert.

\* \* \* \*

There is no excellent beauty that hath not  
some strangeness in the proportion.

—Bacon.

\* \* \* \*

The visions of poets, the most solid an-  
nouncements of any.

—Walt Whitman.

\* \* \* \*

## APPENDIX

A poem is like a prayer; even when public, its essence is solitary. I think one likes to feel as one reads a poem that the world is shut out and that the world will end when the poem is completed.

—O. W. Firkins.

*[This is not the End of the book. This is, perhaps, the Beginning. The following pages are courteously left blank, for the reader (if any) to instal his own meditations. I myself am going to use the space to paste in clippings of the critics' comments. After all, an author can only begin a book. The Conclusion, if any, is contributed by those who read it.]*

\* \* \* \*

## TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE

*... Browning told a good story about himself and a Chinese ambassador in London who was one of the best poets in the Empire. Browning asked him what sort of poems he had chiefly written. He answered: "My poems are mostly enigmatical." "Then," said Browning, "we are brothers."*

Diary of JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS.

Dedicated To  
An Anglo-American Mandarin  
In Whose Heart Are Many  
Celestial Inscriptions  
LOGAN PEARSALL SMITH

## THE PALIMPSEST

*There is, in each man's heart,  
Chinese writing—  
A secret script, a cryptic language:  
The strange ideographs of the spirit,  
Scribbled over or half erased  
By the swift stenography of daily life.*

*No man can easily decipher this cordiscript,  
This blurred text corrupted by fears and follies;  
But now and then,  
Reading his own heart  
(So little studied, such fine reading matter!)  
He sees fragments of rubric shine through—  
Old words of truth and trouble  
Illuminated, red and gold.  
The study of this hidden language  
Is what I call  
Translating from the Chinese.*



## THE OLD MANDARIN



## INSCRIPTION FOR A BUTTERFLY'S WING

**T**HERE are two Languages:  
One is of Great Mandarins and Important  
Affairs,  
It is civil, precise, and meaningless.  
The other,  
The Speech of the Spirit,  
So rarely spoken, so dimly understood,  
Is haltingly whispered  
By lonely men.  
In the first I am glib,  
In the latter I stammer;  
But I know which will serve me  
In the Foreign Land.

## A TIME OF CRISIS

On a thin blue morning  
Of the Month of Officials  
Came Noh Kale, the income tax collector.  
I laid down my roll of Confucius  
And said, "Friend,

My treasure is at your disposal;  
Let us audit it together—  
Thirteen unfinished poems,  
A letter from an editor  
Saying that a check will be here shortly;  
My ivory chopsticks,  
And this view, from my tea house,  
Of the girls bathing on the other side of the river.”  
But still the obstinate agent  
Persisted peevishly  
And with the reiteration of a primitive mind cried  
loudly:  
“Quarterly instalment still due,  
1700 taels.”

INSCRIPTION FOR A MAN-HOLE  
IN BROOKLYN

Sometimes,  
In spinning over the leaves of a book,  
The eye catches a glamorous phrase  
That a methodical search through the volume  
Fails to rediscover.  
Even so, every day,  
There are moments of shining astonishment  
That my sober retrospection  
Can never define.

“THE SUN’S OVER THE  
FOREYARD”

When I was a passenger in the barque *Windrush*  
I became aware of a pleasant sea custom.  
Along toward noon  
The captain’s boy used to come politely to me  
And whisper  
“The captain’s compliments, and the sun’s over  
the foreyard.”  
And presently I learned that this meant  
Come aft to the poop  
And have a drink.  
For mariners, men of sound self-control,  
Never touch the bottle  
Until the sun reaches the yards.

Now that I myself am a seaman  
I always ship in square sail,  
Never in steam.  
In a steamer  
The yards are so much higher.

THE OLD MANDARIN ON  
HIS TRAVELS

When I visited America  
I saw two things that struck me as extraordinary:  
People packed in the subway  
Rocking uneasily on their hams  
Endlessly studying the newspapers;  
And people packed in the movies  
Endlessly staring at the films.  
I said to myself  
If the American people ever develop Minds  
There are two great industries  
That will crash.

AN AMERICAN MYSTIC

But you do not understand the subway,  
Said an American mystic  
Sitting next me at the Rotary Club.  
It is a travelling hermitage,  
A flying monastery,  
A nunnery that moves at fifty miles an hour.  
Into its roaring wagons  
Thoughtful men and women descend with joy:  
They know that there,  
The only place in the whole city,  
They can meditate undisturbed.

HE LIKES TO GIVE BOTH  
SIDES OF THE MATTER

And as for the newspapers  
(Said another)  
You forget that they are the last friend  
Many a poor devil has.  
Go down to Battery Park  
And see the chaps lying on the grass.  
Newspapers are their blankets,  
Their pillows, their sunshades;  
Newspapers their Bibles.  
After everything else has gone  
A poor bum will cling to his newspaper  
As his last link with life.

HÈ PASSES ON THE GOOD  
WORD

The Americans, I said,  
Are the kindest people in the world,  
The most excitable,  
The most juvenile.  
The men are unaware of philosophy,  
The women are unaware they are unaware of philosophy,  
But the young girls . . .

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE

And while I was talking  
I heard with annoyance  
My grand-nephew whispering,  
"I must visit America.  
I never heard the old statesman so eloquent."

THE OLD MANDARIN GRIEVES

When I was in New York  
I studied the faces of the people reading newspapers  
In the subway,  
And I saw that the papers most read  
Were sensational, sordid, salacious.  
And in my mind I composed a little message  
To the editors of those papers.  
"Your readers needed plain, nourishing truth"  
(I said)  
"And you gave them this scented compost,  
Spiced and sugared with vanilla and civet.  
They asked for bread  
And you gave them  
A chocolate éclair."

VERY FEW REMEMBER

As I went down from Trenton  
By a strip of canal sword-blade blue in the dusk,  
I suddenly remembered

THE OLD MANDARIN

That this was the way to Camp Dix  
And I remembered  
Troop trains travelling in the night.

A LETTER TO HIS FRIEND  
MU KOW

The Americans are wrongly supposed to be  
Deficient in delicate sentiment.  
For when I was in New York  
I went to the Polo Grounds  
To see what they call the World's Series.  
One has to watch baseball every instant,  
Or you miss something.  
For while I was foolishly admiring  
The gold frontier of sunlight receding on the turf  
There was a loud cry,  
A whirl of dust and limbs,  
And I feared some tragic accident.  
But when I asked what was amiss  
The man next me, with tears in his eyes,  
Said that one of the players  
Had stolen home.  
And I thought to myself  
How charmingly touching:  
Here, amid all the uproar and excitement,  
This fine fellow could not resist the call of his  
loved ones

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE

And sacrificed his enjoyment just to greet his wife  
and bairns.

There can be no question about it,  
For the next morning I read an account of the  
game

Written by Irvin Cobb, one of their Great Man-  
darins,

And he wrote:

"McNally, afflicted with acute nostalgia,  
Stole home."

HE COMFORTS HIMSELF

When I visited America  
(It is the tedious Old Mandarin speaking)  
I was eager to visit the birthplaces  
Of Emily Dickinson and Louise Imogen Guiney,  
And I found that this people  
Had so neglected two of their greatest poets  
That they hardly even knew their names.  
But I was not peevish nor distraught:  
I said to myself  
Humanity is everywhere alike—  
I myself am but little known in China.

A MOMENT OF MEDITATION

I was told that America was a free country,  
But I found many of its substantial citizens  
Terrorized by the advertisements  
Into believing it was immoral  
To wear a straw hat  
Later than September 15th.  
Wise men know  
There is no such thing as a free country—  
There never will be.

LITTLE MINDS EVERYWHERE  
THE SAME

When I walked in America  
In my ample robes of a philosopher  
Little dogs barked at me  
And rude street-boys  
Called me Lane Bryant,  
Which is, apparently,  
The name of an American mandarin.  
Even so, when Prominent Americans  
Visiting China  
Go hurrying about in their tubular trousers  
Little dogs bark with anguish.

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE

Thus do petty minds in all lands  
Confronted by the unusual  
Show their distress.

AN ENIGMA IN THE WOODPILE

An American friend of mine,  
A Man in a newspaper office,  
Is very wealthy  
He tells me he has an income  
Of 10,000 interruptions a year

HIS EXPERIENCE WITH THE  
NEWSPAPERS

When the ship came up the harbour  
The New York reporters  
Hastened to assail me with questions.  
For some curious reason  
They were eager for my views  
On the Fourth Dimension,  
Which was then  
(So I heard afterward)  
A subject of violent discussion  
In the Sunday Magazine Sections.  
Rather pleased by their interest in such matters,  
I said, in all good faith,

THE OLD MANDARIN

*The Fourth Dimension is Supra-Spatial:  
It bears the same relation to Space  
That Space does to Flatness.  
It may be said to be Continuity,  
Or, speaking poetically,  
It is the Shadow  
That Time casts on Eternity.*

But the high-spirited City Editors,  
Finding these modest thoughts of mine  
Insufficiently nimble,  
Invented others.  
They came out that afternoon with large headlines:  
AGED MANDARIN SAYS SHORT SKIRTS  
MAKE HIM FEEL YOUNG AGAIN.

ERIT ILLE MIHI SEMPER DEUS

I see a lawn  
Strewn here and there with little knobs of bone  
And chewed billets,  
And I feel justified in saying  
Somewhere hereabouts  
Is a dog.

I see a world  
Strewn here and there

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE

With delightful evidences of law—  
Geometrical cobwebs, dark blue thunderheads,  
The lid of the tea kettle gently chinkling,  
Hailstones round and white as camphor-balls —  
I say, it looks as though there were a god.

Even if this god is only the binomial theorem,  
He is no less a god.

THE HUBBUB OF THE  
UNIVERSE

Man makes a great fuss  
About this planet  
Which is only a ball-bearing  
In the hub of the universe.  
It reminds me  
Of the staff of a humorous weekly  
Sitting in grave conference  
On a two-line joke.

A PATTERN IN THE MUD

Sometimes, in the slime of a city street,  
You will see a clear and lovely pattern  
Of little loops and triangles  
Imprinted by the tire  
Of a motor truck.

## THE OLD MANDARIN

Such was the life of No Sho,  
The young and tender poet.  
The city crushed him,  
But he left his runes  
In the grime.

## THE CIGARETTE STUB

Tossed aside in the uproar  
No Sho was quenched;  
But in his verses  
You will hear a satirical whisper  
Like the hiss of a cigarette stub  
Cast into a sink.

## TRAFFIC

Yes, the traffic problem is terrible.  
I find it so in my mind, too.  
Skipping from the swift shining limousine of an  
Emotion,  
I am spattered by the broad tires of a thundering  
Platitude;  
Almost nipped by a clangorous ambulance bearing  
a svoning Certainty  
I barely escape the rumbling trolley of Doubt.

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE

And ever and again,  
While my timid soul stands dubiously alert,  
The Fire Chief goes chiming up my medulla  
In his little red racer.

VOICES IN THE DARK

There are echoes and shoutings in the dark of the  
mind  
As menacing, reiterative, calamitous-sounding,  
As Extras indistinguishably bawled  
In uptown streets at night.

And then the next morning  
You learn they meant nothing.

A HUMAN INSTINCT

Youth is conservative,  
Youth is the Tory,  
Youth is the quencher of bright conflagration!  
For whenever I light a match to kindle my pipe  
of opium  
The young Mandarin and those quaint damsels  
his sisters  
Competitively cry  
*O Sire, O Father, O Serene Progenitor,*  
*May I blow it out?*

THE BULB

My mind is like an electric bulb  
With a broken filament.  
The tremulous fine threads of thought  
Waver and waver and waver  
And when they meet  
There is a little fizzing flash,  
And my soul is filled  
With a sudden delicate green-blue light.

SEVENTY TIMES SEVEN

I was afraid the parson  
Would go to law  
About that \$490 I owed him.  
But I bilked him.  
I offered to pay it in seventy instalments  
Of seven dollars each,  
And he didn't dare  
Take the money.

POINT OF VIEW

When Abraham Lincoln was murdered  
The thing that interested Matthew Arnold  
Was that the assassin

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE

Shouted in Latin  
As he leapt on the stage.  
This convinced Matthew  
There was still hope for America.

NOT NEGOTIABLE

Gold is real money;  
Bills are not.  
Yet, in nine shops out of ten,  
If you offer a gold piece  
They are vaguely disturbed:  
They would prefer the familiar greenback  
And anxiously suspect  
They are being diddled.  
Observe the fable,  
You literary men!

MALADIE DU SIÈCLE

All day long, said the Old Mandarin,  
I closed myself in my study, to think;  
And all day long  
I was aware of the telephone in the next room  
Coiled there like a rattlesnake  
Ready to strike.

VOICES IN THE FOG

Now returns the season of misty mornings:  
From this inland pagoda, before my breakfast,  
I hear the boats whistling  
In the Gulf of Shi-pa-hoy.  
What mellow groaning and musical interchange!  
They sound to me like the cries of philosophers  
Plaintively feeling their dangerous way  
Through the fogs of metaphysical error.  
I seem to hear  
The soft faint drone of Confucius,  
The confident boom of Lord Bacon,  
The perplexed rumble of Coleridge,  
The hoarse jarring mutter of Schopenhauer,  
The clear siren of Santayana,  
The shrill hoot of Voltaire!

HIC SUDAVIT SED NON  
FRUSTRA

The girl in the apartment next door  
(After assiduous practice)  
Has really mastered one piece on the piano—  
A rollicking, meaningless, pseudo-highbrow air,  
Full of stolen cadences, synthetic harmony,  
And, where the composer was doubtful,  
Padded with plenty of bass chords.

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE

Just now I came up in the elevator  
With a young man.  
He rang the bell of the next apartment  
And was friendly welcomed in.  
By the time I was in my sitting room  
I heard her dashing off her piece  
With spontaneous abandon.  
O Confucius, O Shakespeare, O Louisa M. Alcott  
and Alfred Dunhill,  
Will life never pull anything new?

STRATEGY

When, in my youth, I studied the law,  
I learned that a skilful advocate  
Arranges his argument so that the opposition  
Will make just the replies he desires.

Even so in a restaurant  
The waiter brings your change  
Cunningly composed of quarters  
Facilitating  
A generous tip

NO ANSWER

Again and again (said the Old Mandarin)  
As I pace my garden walks  
My favourite Tonkin spaniel

## THE OLD MANDARIN

Hopefully lays a stick at my feet,  
Imploring my attention for a game.  
Deep in thought, I pay no heed.

Just so, I reflect,  
Simple men lay offerings, sacrifices, prayers,  
At the altars of their gods,  
Gaze wistfully for a sign.  
There is no sign:  
The gods walk gravely on,  
Deep in thought.

Even the collapse of the Woolworth Building  
Would not placate the Law of Gravity.

## COMPLACENCE

And yet (he continued)  
Dogs are not always the emblems of humility.  
I have seen men of great pride,  
But none who rode this planet  
As grotesquely complacent  
As a solitary chow  
In the rear of a limousine.

PRAGMATISM

When Chancellor Mu Kow and I were ennuyés  
We used to go to the windy hill  
And fly paper kites.  
“Have you considered, Tremendous One”  
(I asked him),  
“The paradox of a kite?  
To make it soar steadily  
You must weight it down with a tail;  
And to keep the spirit lofty, it is well . . .”  
—“Do not, I beg you”  
(Replied the Great Magistrate),  
“Unsettle me with analogies.  
You have only to meditate and watch the goldfish,  
I must govern a province.”

BURLESQUE SHOW

Curious how often you see a man  
Who seems a blemished caricature of some other  
person.  
There is a coolie  
Who cleanses my fishponds:  
He looks exactly like the faintly degraded replica  
Of my friend the Chancellor—

## THE OLD MANDARIN

With all his Excellency's keenness, wit, and  
assurance  
Blurred and rubbed out.  
Nature, to be sure,  
Is the great Burlesquer.

## WEAKNESS

If you approach me  
I shall cheerfully promise  
More than I can perform:  
For I have my frailties.

But withinward, my soul  
Evades, eludes, recedes;  
And you must not be peevish—  
I have my own secrets to pursue  
And so have you.

## TESTAMENT OF NO SHO

Prithee (cried No Sho, the young poet)  
Shut out the baby:  
Don't let her come into my thinking-room  
She is a darling  
And her every movement is a loveliness;  
But how can I afford to look at her—

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE

I, who already have notes for hundreds more  
poems  
Than I can ever write.

For I have had moments  
When every form and colour of life  
Seemed bursting with naked poetry—  
*Broadway for the taxis,*  
*Columbus for the L,*  
*But Amsterdam's the Avenue*  
*Where trucks go down like hell——*

And there are so many lovely poems being written  
I am amazed:  
For how do the darling poets find time and chance  
to live them,  
Those moments of millennium  
When the mind ignites the hand?  
But for this was I born  
And for this came I into the world  
To blow from the slippery suds of life  
My bubbles of fragile glee.

CONTRADICTION

I saw a man about to write a poem:  
He trod ruthlessly down a subway car,  
Leaving behind him, left and right,

## THE OLD MANDARIN

Macerated corns  
And anguished faces.  
Twenty minutes later  
He wrote a lyric  
Of exquisite tenderness.

## EXEMPT

In a subway car  
I saw a girl reading the *New Republic*  
Her long dark lashes  
Were bent above an article  
Called "The Surplus Woman."  
She was temptingly beautiful  
And she smiled upon the text  
With gentle assurance and security.

## MEDITATIONS ON POETRY

Poets seem to be much in demand.  
Drawing room evenings, women's club meetings,  
Literary luncheons, Chamber of Commerce  
dinners,  
Wherever two or three sandwiches are gathered  
together  
There is always a poet  
Exchanging his "message"

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE

For an equivalent bulk  
Of chicken chow mein  
And jellied sharks' fins.  
All this is proof  
Of a widespread hunger,  
And not merely on the part of the poet.

A PRAGMATIST

The American poet Lindsay  
(A mercurial fellow)  
Began his career  
By codifying the ways in which a poet  
Can get a free meal.  
Here was a seer!  
Here was a man with strong grasp of essentials!

A HAPPY LIFE

The American poet Whitman  
Did little to assist the razor industry,  
But he erected a plausible philosophy  
Of indolence  
Which, without soft concealments,  
He called *Loafing*.  
This so irritated the American people  
(Who were busy putting up buildings

#### THE OLD MANDARIN

And tearing them down again)  
That they never forgave him.  
He was deficient in humour,  
But he had a good time.

#### A NATIONAL FRAILTY

The American people  
Were put into the world  
To assist foreign lecturers.  
When I visited them  
They filled crowded halls  
To hear me tell them Great Truths  
Which they might as well have read  
In their own prophet Thoreau.  
They paid me, for this,  
Three hundred dollars a night,  
And ten of their mandarins  
Invited me to visit at Newport.  
My agent told me  
If I would wear Chinese costume on the platform  
It would be five hundred.

#### THE MAN WITH THE RAKE

It is queer to think that many people  
Have never raked leaves.  
On a brilliant Sunday morning in October

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE

I admired trees as ruddy as burnt orange,  
Trees as pale and clear as Sauterne.  
Raking placidly  
I enjoyed the crisp rustle.

That is what I like about raking leaves—  
It is wine and opiate for the mind:  
The incessant skirmish of the wits is calmed,  
And as you rake and burn  
And dodge, with smarting eyes  
The pungent, veering reek,  
You fall into a dull easy muse,  
And think to yourself,  
After all, what is writing books  
But raking leaves?

And at such times  
I plant the seeds of poems.  
It takes poems a long while to grow—  
They lie germinating in the dark of the mind;  
But next spring, very likely,  
There may emerge the green and tender shoots  
Of two or three bright stanzas.

VERITAS VOS DAMNABIT

It is the mark of extreme youth  
To believe that telling the Whole Truth  
Is always useful.  
Truth is not a diet  
But a condiment.

ANOTHER POSTPONEMENT

Once, on a midnight of rain and gale,  
When the windows rattled in the hollow darkness,  
I was in the kitchen  
Eating cold turkey and cranberry sauce  
Frisked from the icebox.  
My mind was clear and busy:  
Then, I suppose, I came as near as I ever shall  
To being ready to write a great poem. . . .  
But I lay down on my couch to meditate  
And was soon fast asleep.

ADVANTAGE OF A BOOKISH  
UPBRINGING

When the wine has done its rosy deed  
(As the reputable English poet said)  
I enjoy to study in tranquillity

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE

The lovable absurdities of men.  
And then my familiarity with literatures  
Besteads me well,  
Affording me always a scholarly explanation  
For conduct seemingly eccentric.

Once, I remember,  
After an evening in which Chancellor Mu Kow  
and myself  
Had repeatedly toasted the loveliness of the moon,  
Condoling her solitude  
In the wide pale sky,  
I lay in a perfection of comfortable thought  
In a gently revolving cabbage field.  
But my wife's parents  
Heading the search party  
Discovered me there, and cried lamentation and  
oxytones.  
Be of good cheer, I said:  
It is with me as with the great Flaubert  
Who pernoctated in a cabbage patch  
Noting down, for purpose of literature,  
The tincture of moonshine  
On the leaves of the vegetables.  
Even so, I sacrifice myself for realism.  
Tenderly they carried me in.

## THE OLD MANDARIN

$$(a+b)^2$$

Marriage is the square of  $a$  plus  $b$   
In other words  
 $a^2 + b^2 + 2ab$   
Where  $2ab$  (of course)  
Are twins.

## SECRET THOUGHTS

And while my visitor prattled  
I courteously nodded;  
My eye was fast upon him,  
My face bright with attention;  
But inwardly I was saying:  
“The excellent fellow, why does he tell me all this?  
What has this to do with me?  
O Buddha, when will he depart?”

## IRRITATION OF THE OLD MANDARIN

There was another reporter  
(A young woman, this time)  
Who came to my hotel to ask whether  
The Fine Art of Self-Salesmanship

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE

Had made much progress in China?  
I said, "Dear young Madam,  
As regards ladies, our language has for that Fine  
Art  
An ugly word.  
As regards Aggressive Business Men  
I can only say,  
*Caveat Emptor.*"

BIVALVES

The pearl  
Is a disease of the oyster.  
A poem  
Is a disease of the spirit  
Caused by the irritation  
Of a granule of Truth  
Fallen into that soft gray bivalve  
We call the mind.

ETERNITY AND THE TOOTH

In regard to Eternity (said the Old Mandarin)  
I feel about it as I do about one of my teeth.  
Every now and then it gives me  
A devil of a twinge,  
And for a while

## THE OLD MANDARIN

I groan and can think of naught else.  
Then the anguish abates and I dismiss it from my  
mind.  
But I know, just the same,  
That some day  
I've got to go through with it.

## A PROVERB

We have a saying in China  
That a man will wash his hands cleaner for visitors  
Than he will for the family.  
Even so,  
He who is full of sententious wisdom in public  
May be dark and doubtful within.

## THE TOLERATOR

From time to time  
I have laid my heart bare before you  
And you did not like it.  
So I must point out to you  
It is *my* heart, not yours.

My wrongness, perhaps,  
Is dearer to me  
Than your rightness.

Yet you must not think  
That when I disagree with you  
I dislike you.  
On the contrary:  
I love you for having ideas of your own.  
I know how you came to have those ideas,  
And they are precious to you.

### THE PAINTER

I talked with a young painter,  
And as we came along Beekman Street  
My eye dwelt upon the shining audacity  
of the Woolworth Building.  
But he was peering downward along the curb  
Where were clear pools of melted snow.  
"See!" he cried,  
"That's how it ought to be painted!"  
There, reflected in a long panel of water,  
Sharp and exquisite, was the pale tower—  
Enriching every puddle in the neighbourhood

True! I said—  
Beauty is like the Medusa:  
Look her in the face, and you run mad;  
But, like Perseus,  
Study her reflection in the polished shield  
Look upon life in the mirror of some art  
And, perhaps, you will stay sane.

THE POET

I talked with a poet  
Who had just cashed a royalty check.  
"In the last six months," he boasted,  
"They sold thirty copies.  
I tell you, it warms the cockles  
Of my right-hand trouser."

VARIATIONS ON BUDDHIST  
SAPPHICS

If it should happen in somebody's office  
That you were offered a noggin of cognac  
And had to drink it in a cup of cardboard,

You would not dare to degust it leisurely:  
You must drink fast, before the vivid essence  
Ate through the seam of the chaste little vesicle.

So if we propose, my frolicsome people,  
To pour great poetry in the crimped paper  
Sterilized lilycups of daily behaviour,  
Series of neat little days from containers,  
Caulk them with paraffin—  
Or drink in a hurry.

ADJUSTMENT

In your Great City  
I see, in jewellers' windows,  
Clocks that tell the guaranteed Correct Time;  
And in front of those clocks people always halted  
Adjusting their watches.  
But suppose there were displayed, beside the  
street,  
Some great poem,  
Telling perfect Truth or Beauty,  
How many passengers  
Would pause to adjust their minds?

THE SURF

We took the baby  
(Three years old)  
To the beach at Lloyd's Neck.  
A cold northern day and the wind was crisping  
surf on the beach.  
She looked at the white foam  
And heard its rhyming prosody.  
"Snow," she announced.  
"Snow saying, Sorrow to come in,  
Sorrow to come in."

ANTICRASTINATION

On my way to your theatres, said the dubious Old  
Mandarin,  
I see To-morrow's papers already on sale  
At eight o'clock To-night.  
So does your strange mad city  
Leap hotly towards the Future,  
Tossing aside each Day before it is finished,  
Hunggrily, fatuously, craving the next.  
Is it possible that the Editor  
Is dissatisfied with each and every of his irreplace-  
able To-days  
That he hurries To-morrow so close upon its heels?

SUGGESTION

For Dancing and Dining, said the Old Mandarin,  
I like to go to that chophouse  
Where the couples, circling merrily,  
Continually pass a sign,  
Posted beside the dancing floor:  
EXQUISITE VEGETABLE DINNER.  
It seems, he said,  
To make carnal thoughts impossible.

PROGRAMME NOTE FOR  
A COSMIC MELODRAMA

The creator requests the audience  
Not to divulge the solution  
Of the mystery on which the action is founded.  
Future patrons  
Will more greatly relish the dénouement  
If kept in suspense  
Till the final curtain.

THOUGHTS IN THE GULF  
STREAM

Who has described the wave  
Crisping oblique from *Caronia's* bow  
In clear summer midnight?  
Brighter than snow the crumble, the running  
    curling crumble  
Flung by her wedgy stem:  
Then a hollow, a lovely bending hollow,  
Which swells up to a spread, an outward comb of  
    breaker  
Drawing veins and stripings  
After it through the black:  
And the little phosphor-sparkle,

## THE OLD MANDARIN

The seethe along her side,  
All this has never been properly described  
Because no passenger ever sees it  
With detached and watchful mind.  
None of them  
In clear summer midnight  
Ever sees it alone.

## ANXIETY

It worries me  
To hear people cough late at night  
For then I know they are lying awake  
And probably thinking  
And it troubles me to think about people thinking  
Alone, in bed, at night.

## NONE OF MY BUSINESS

I saw a satisfied bee  
Blissfully asleep in a hollyhock flower.  
I tickled him with a straw  
To see if he would wake,  
And then I was ashamed  
Realizing how gravely I had been infected  
By your American passion for interfering  
In other people's affairs.

No harm was done, however—  
He only grumbled affectionately  
And turned over on the other side.

DISTRIBUTION OF CREDIT

It is certainly true  
(Admitted the Old Mandarin)  
That a great proportion of meritorious poetry  
Was inspired by beautiful women,  
But it would never have been actually written  
Without black coffee.

MATIN AU LUXEMBOURG

Oh Medici Fountain,  
Sombre in your aisle of leaves, where confused  
shadow  
Aggravates young artists;  
Where Sorbonne students read intermittently  
And trysting lovers  
Sorrow about many things—  
In your dusky basin the Parisian sparrows  
More hygienic than most natives of the Quarter  
Begin the day with a bath.

HOURS OF AFFLUENCE

And in the Métro—the Paris subway—  
They have the prettiest verbal nicety:  
They call Rush Hours  
*Les Heures d'Affluence.*

ANXIETIES OF A PURSER

Never let a glass keep ringing  
Is a sea superstition.  
A tumbler, accidentally tingled so that it chimes  
Must be stilled at once, or it means bad fortune.  
Evenings in the old *Echolalia*  
How we used to keep our host, the purser, leaping  
    from side to side,  
By surreptitiously ticking our glasses.  
There was only one way for him to avert ill omen—  
Keeping our goblets full.

A LITTLE SICKNESS

At the back of the flower-bed  
I find a washed-out flake of cardboard—  
An imitation daffodil.  
And I remember, with a little sickness in my heart,

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE

That when the children  
Had gaily picked most of those new trembles of  
April  
I bade them fabricate facsimile daffodils  
With cardboard and crayon  
And stick them in the ground in place of the  
ravished ones.  
I wanted them to learn that beauty  
Once plucked up, can't quite be replaced.  
"Old enough to know better," I told them  
sternly —  
Ah, poor fool,  
As though anyone ever was!

TO C. H. P.

Cross-legged in pyjamas on the floor at one A. M.  
Under an electric light  
I was enjoying some Japanese poetry.  
Suddenly the light went out:  
Through the tracery of the oak tree  
I saw the old moon rising,  
One burning star balanced in a cool chink,  
Heard the steady thrill of the crickets—  
A hokku, a very hokku!  
There, unguessed and unregarded  
Had been the perfect essence of what I was ad-  
miring

## THE OLD MANDARIN

In mere paper and ink.  
This is very important, I said,  
As I stared at the fragile night.  
The bulb went out on purpose to teach me  
Not to take the translation for the original.

## THE NEW MOON FEELING

How is it, by what incalculable instinct,  
That now and then, in a clean afternoon,  
By some touch of air or slope of twilight,  
Without previous thought I say to myself  
(And am unerringly right)  
It feels as if  
There were a New Moon.

## CAVE CANEM

Taking my evening stroll  
I cautiously keep to the woodland alley  
Turning back before reaching the neighbours'  
houses  
To avoid startling any of the dogs.  
It might be well, I ponder,  
If one could do thus in the mind also,  
Warily retracing one's thoughts  
Before arousing the outcry  
Of some indignant hound.

MEDITATION ON THE HEARTH

A householder who has once  
Had a fire in the chimney  
Will perhaps be careful  
Before he again puts a match  
To a bundle of excelsior.

VIGILIAE ALBAE

Now I am silent and my name is Tacitus.  
But in this douce brightness  
I have to pause now and then  
Putting the moon behind the pine tree  
To give myself respite  
From her cruel and insinuating lustre.  
O moon, scratch-pad of poets,  
More meant against than meaning!

TICK DOULOUREUX

I am wounded  
In a fatal artery.  
The vein of Time is cut,  
The minutes are bleeding, bleeding away.  
Bartender, make me a tourniquet for this hemor-  
rhage  
Or I shall tick to death.

DEATH OF A JOURNALIST

Midway of this mortal life, the fellow  
Met something he had never known before—  
A region, very wide and deep, of Silence.

His notion was, at first, to write a sonnet:

*Sonnet in Praise of Silence.*

Yes, you smile,

But he smiled first. He didn't finish it:

He only wrote eight lines. Oh well, perhaps  
That's the finest tribute I can pay him.



THURSDAY EVENING

*To Dorothy Stockbridge*

## CHARACTERS

GORDON JOHNS, *a Young Business Man*

LAURA, *Mrs. Gordon Johns*

MRS. SHEFFIELD, *Laura's Mother*

MRS. JOHNS, *Gordon's Mother*

## THURSDAY EVENING

### SCENE

*A small suburban kitchen in the modest home of Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Johns. A meal has recently been cooked, as is shown by a general confusion of pots and pans and dish-cloths. At the rear, an icebox standing in the corner. Rear, centre, two shelved cabinets, one containing groceries and household sundries, the other dishes and glassware. Rear, L, an oil range. Some baby linen and very small shirts (such as would be suitable for a child of about ten months) are hanging on a clothes-horse near the stove. Door R leads out to back porch; there are two windows in R wall, one each side of door. Door L to dining-room. At the corner in the rear, L, door opening on back stairs, which ascend to upper parts of the house. Down stage, L, against side wall, a sink and oilcloth covered drain-board or shelf beside it. In the centre of stage a small table covered with oilcloth. A kitchen chair in corner, down R.*

*When the scene opens, Gordon and Laura are carrying in soiled dishes through door, L. They come in and out several times, making methodical arrangements for cleaning up. They pile the dishes on the shelf by the sink. Gordon takes dishpan from a hook under the sink, and fills it with hot water from the kettle on the stove. Laura,*

## ONE ACT PLAYS

*who is an attractive little person, aged about twenty-three, is in that slightly tense condition of a young hostess who has had a long and trying day with house and baby, and has also cooked and served a dinner for four.*

GORDON

All right, Creature, just wait till I light my pipe and we'll polish this up. (*Lights pipe and rolls up shirtsleeves.*)

LAURA (*taking an apron from chair in corner*)

Put this on first. That's the only decent pair of trousers you've got.

(*Enter Mrs. Sheffield, carrying dishes.*)

MRS. SHEFF

Now you children run along and take it easy. I'll do all this.

LAURA

No, no, Mother. You go and talk to Mrs. Johns. (*Pointedly.*) Don't let her come in here.

MRS. SHEFF (*ultramaternally*)

Poor baby, she's tired. You've been on your feet all day, now let Mother wash up for you. That was a big dinner to cook.

LAURA

No tireder than you are, Mother darling. You cooked lunch.

GORDON

Both of you clear out; I can get this done in no time.

## THURSDAY EVENING

MRS. SHEFF (*patting Laura's cheek*)

Busy with the baby all afternoon, and then cooking such a delicious dinner—— Dearie, won't you let Mother do this for you?

LAURA

There isn't room in this kitchen for everybody——  
(*Enter Mrs. Johns, carrying dishes.*)

MRS. JOHNS

Gordon, you and Laura go and rest. Let the two grandmothers——

GORDON

Now listen, little people, this is my job. I always wash up on Thursday evenings——

MRS. JOHNS

You go and read your newspaper. I can see you're all fagged out after that long day in the office——

MRS. SHEFF (*to Laura*)

*Please go and lie down, Baby. You're so tired.*

LAURA (*with waning patience*)

You two go and amuse yourselves; Gordon and I'll attend to this. (*They gently eject the two mothers-in-law.*)

GORDON

Come on, now, the good old system! (*He takes the small table from centre of stage, and puts it carefully midway between sink and dish cabinet. Takes chair from corner, down R, and sets it beside table. Laura sits down on chair and wipes silverware and dishes as he hands them to her after washing.*)

## ONE ACT PLAYS

LAURA

The silver first, while the water's clean.

GORDON

Right. We make a pretty good team at this, don't we?

LAURA (*holds up a small silver jug*)

That darling old cream jug. Mother used that when she was a little girl.

GORDON

I love our little Thursday evening suppers. I think they're more fun than any other night.

LAURA

I'm glad, Gordie.

GORDON

We get better grub on Thursdays, when Ethel goes out, than we ever do when she's in.

LAURA

I tried to have everything specially nice to-night. Some visitors are very critical.

GORDON

It was lovely. I'm afraid it was hard for you, Creature, to have Mother come just now. (*A short pause.*) Especially when *your* mother was here.

LAURA

Didn't she know Mother was here?

GORDON

No. I hadn't told her. You see your mother is here so much more often. I didn't know your

## THURSDAY EVENING

mother would still be here. I was afraid Mother might be a little hurt——

LAURA

Mother helps me a great deal. I think it's a queer thing if a wife can't have her mother stay with her once in a while——

GORDON (*aware of danger, changes the subject*)

Ye Gods, Ethel has cracked the Copenhagen platter. (*Laura is silent.*) That's one of the set Mother gave us when we were married.

LAURA

It's a stock pattern. You can get another at any department store.

GORDON

I'll bet that coon didn't empty the icebox pan before she went. I never saw a cook yet who could remember to do that——

LAURA

If you had to go out and hunt for them you wouldn't be so particular. She's better than no one.

GORDON (*goes to icebox and removes a large, brimming pan from under it*)

What did I tell you! (*The water slops over from pan as he carries it gingerly to sink and empties it. He replaces the pan under icebox.*)

LAURA

You'd better heat some more water. You've poured that ice-water into the dishpan.

## ONE ACT PLAYS

GORDON (*getting a little peevish; refills kettle and puts it on stove*)

It's perfectly absurd not having any pantry to keep the icebox in. In here, the heat of the stove melts the ice right away. (*Goes back to icebox and slams its doors shut.*) Of course, she never keeps the doors properly closed. (*He returns to sink and resumes dishwashing.*) It's a funny thing.

LAURA

What is?

GORDON

Why, that a presumably intelligent coon can't understand the doors of an icebox are meant to be kept tight shut, to save ice. What does she suppose those little clamps are for? (*Laura is silent. There is a pause, while Gordon scrapes portions of food off the soiled plates. He examines some of these plates rather carefully, and picks out several large pieces of meat, lettuce, butter, etc., which he puts on one plate at one side. Then he seems to resume his good humour and relights his pipe.*) Well, it's jolly to have both the grandmothers here together, isn't it?

LAURA

Gordon, dear, put the silver away in the sideboard before it gets wet again. (*He gathers up silver from the table in front of her and exit L. Laura steps outside door R, and returns, bringing garbage can, which she puts down by the sink. She begins to wash dishes, and sees the plate of odds and ends which Gordon has carefully put to one*

## THURSDAY EVENING

*side. She scrapes its contents into the garbage pail. While she is washing, Gordon enters, L.)*

GORDON

Now, Creature, let me do that. You don't want to spoil those pretty hands. (*Takes them, with an attempt to be affectionate.*)

LAURA

I guess it isn't any worse for them than washing the baby's things.

GORDON

Come on, old man, let me. (*Gently removes her from sink, and pushes her to the chair by the table. She sits down and wipes dishes as he hands them to her.*) It doesn't take long when there are two of us.

LAURA

Gordie, these dishes aren't properly clean. You can't get that grease off without hot water.

GORDON

I guess that kettle's hot by now. (*To stove, feels water in kettle.*) Give it a minute longer. (*Stands by stove and puffs at his pipe. In a moment of false security, he foolishly reopens a dangerous topic.*) You know, I'm a little worried about Mother.

LAURA (*putting away dishes,*  
Why?

GORDON

I don't think she's as well as usual. She hardly ate any of her salad.

## ONE ACT PLAYS

LAURA (*turns as though about to say something, but checks herself and pauses a moment. This time it is she who tries honourably to avert the gathering storm*)

Oh, Gordie, I forgot to tell you! Junior drank out of a cup to-day—the first time!

GORDON

He did! The little rascal!

LAURA

Look, here's the cup. (*Shows a small silver cup.*)

GORDON (*affectionately, putting his arm around her*)

Well, well. (*Looks at cup.*) What cup is that?  
I don't seem to remember it——

LAURA

Why—Mother brought it with her. She used it when she was a baby.

GORDON

Where's that nice old christening mug of mine? I think Junior would like to use that once in a while, too.

LAURA

I put it away, dear. I was afraid Ethel might dent it.

GORDON (*takes kettle from stove, goes back to sink*)

I hope Mother isn't feeling poorly. I noticed at supper ——

LAURA

When hot meat is served, refined people usually call it *dinner* ——

## THURSDAY EVENING

GORDON (*looks at her cautiously, and suddenly seems to realize that they are on the edge of an abyss*)

Now, honey, you're tired. You go and rest, I'll finish up here.

LAURA

No, thank you. I like to see that everything gets cleaned up properly. Someone might come snooping out here, and then there'd be hints about my housekeeping. Of course, I'll admit I wasn't brought up to be a cook——

GORDON (*seeks inspiration by relighting his pipe, and takes up a handsome silver coffee-pot*)

One thing I never can make out is, how to prevent coffee grounds from going down the sink. (*He talks desperately, trying to tide over the mutually realized danger point.*) Perhaps if I could invent some kind of a little coffee-ground strainer I'd make our fortune. That coffee was delicious, Creature.

LAURA

Take care of that urn, it's one of the few handsome things we have.

GORDON

It is a beauty.

LAURA

Jack Davis gave it to me——

GORDON (*puts it down with distaste*)

I guess I'd better attend to the garbage.

LAURA (*nervously*)

It's all fixed.

## ONE ACT PLAYS

GORDON

I always like Thursdays because that's the one evening Ethel doesn't get a chance to throw away about five dollars' worth of good food.

LAURA

I fixed the garbage. You can put the pail outside.

GORDON (*hunting among plates on the shelf beside sink*)

Where's that plate I put here? There was a lot of perfectly good stuff I saved —

LAURA (*blows up at last*)

Well, if you think I'm going to keep a lot of half-eaten salad your mother picked over —

GORDON (*seizes garbage pail, lifts it up to the sink and begins to explore its contents. His fuse also is rapidly shortening*)

My Lord, it's no wonder we never have any money to spend if we chuck half of it away in waste. (*Picking out various selections.*) Waste! Look at that piece of cheese, and those potatoes. You could take those things, and some of this meat, and make a nice economical hash for lunch——

LAURA

It's a wonder you wouldn't get a job as a scavenger. I never *heard* of a husband like you, rummaging through the garbage pail.

GORDON (*blows up*)

Do you know what the one unforgivable sin is? The sin against the Holy Ghost? It's *Waste!*

## THURSDAY EVENING

It makes me wild to think of working and working like a dog, and half of what I earn just thrown away by an ignorant coon. Look at this, just look at it! (*Displays a grisly object.*) There's enough meat on that bone to make soup. And ye gods, here's that jar of anchovy paste! (*Holds it up.*) I thought you got that for me as a little treat. I wondered where it had gone to. Why, I hadn't eaten more than just the top of it.

LAURA

Well, you left it, and left it, and it got mildewed.

GORDON

Scrape it off. A little mildew won't hurt anybody. There'll be mildew on my bank account if this kind of thing goes on. (*Still examining garbage pail.*) Look here, about half a dozen slices of bread. What's the matter with *them*, I'd like to know.

LAURA

I think it's the most disgusting thing I ever heard of. To go picking over the garbage pail like that. You attend to your affairs and I'll attend to mine.

GORDON

I guess throwing away good, hard-earned money is my affair, isn't it?

LAURA

You're always quick enough to find fault. I know Ethel's careless, but she's the best I can get out here in this godforsaken suburb. Maybe

## ONE ACT PLAYS

you'll be good enough to find me a better servant. A well-trained girl wouldn't work in this old dump, where there isn't even gas. You don't seem to know when you're lucky. You come back at night and find your home well cared for and me slaving over a hot dinner, and do you ever say a word of thanks? No, all you can think of is finding fault. I can't imagine how you were brought up. Your mother——

GORDON

Just leave my mother out of it. I guess she didn't spoil me the way yours did you. Of course, I wasn't an only daughter

LAURA

I wish you had been. Then I wouldn't have married you.

GORDON

I suppose you think that if you'd married Jack Davis or some other of those profiteers you'd never have had to see the inside of a kitchen——

LAURA

If Junior grows up with your disposition, all I can say is, I hope he'll never get married.

GORDON

If he gets married, I hope it'll be to some girl who understands something about economy——

LAURA

If he gets married, I hope he'll be man enough not to be always finding fault ——

## THURSDAY EVENING

GORDON

Well, he *won't* get married! I'll put him wise to what marriage means, fussing like this all the time——

LAURA

Yes, he *will* get married. He *shall* get married!

GORDON

Oh, this is too absurd——

LAURA

He *shall* get married, just to be a humiliating example to his father. I'll bring him up the way a husband *ought* to be.

GORDON

In handcuffs, I suppose——

LAURA

And his wife won't have to sit and listen to perpetual criticism from his mother——

GORDON

If you're so down on mothers-in-law, it's queer you're anxious to be one yourself. The expectant mother-in-law!

LAURA

Al' right, be vulgar, I dare say you can't help it.

GORDON

Great Scott, what did you think marriage was like, anyway? Did you expect to go through life having everything done for you, without a little hard work to make it interesting?

LAURA

Is it necessary to shout?

## ONE ACT PLAYS

GORDON

Now let me tell you something. Let's see if you can ratify it from your extensive observation of life. Is there anything in the world so cruel as bringing up a girl in absolute ignorance of housework, believing that all her days she's going to be waited on hand and foot, and that marriage is one long swoon of endearments —

LAURA

There's not much swooning while you're around.

GORDON

Why, I believe you actually think your life is wrecked if you aren't being petted and praised every minute. You pretend to think marriage is so sacred and yet you're buffaloeed by a few greasy dishes. I like my kind of sacredness better than yours, and that's the sacredness of common sense. Marriage ought not to be performed before an altar, but before a kitchen sink.

LAURA (*furiously*)

I ought to have known that oil and water won't mix. I ought to have known that a vulgar, selfish, conceited man couldn't make a girl happy who was brought up in a refined family. I was a Sheffield, and why I ever became a Johns is more than I can imagine. Johns—I suppose that's camouflage for Jones. You're too common, too ordinary, to know when you're lucky. You get a charming, aristocratic wife and expect her to grub along like a washerwoman. You try to crush all the life and spirit out of her.

## THURSDAY EVENING

You ought to have married an icebox—that's the only thing in this house you're really attentive to.

GORDON

Now listen——

LAURA (*will not be checked*)

Talk about being spoiled—why, your mother babies you so, you think you're the only man on earth. (*Sarcastically.*) Her poor, over-worked boy, who tries so hard and gets all fagged out in the office and struggles so nobly to support his family! I wonder how you'd like to run this house and bear a child and take care of it and shuffle along with an ignorant coon for a maid and then cook a big dinner and be sneered at and never a word of praise. All you can think of is picking over the garbage pail and finding fault——

GORDON (*like a fool*)

I didn't find fault. I found some good food being wasted.

LAURA

All right, if you love the garbage pail better than you do your wife, you can live with it. (*Flings her dishtowel on the floor and exits, L.*)

(*Gordon stands irresolutely at the sink, and makes a few gloomy motions among the unfinished dishes. He glares at the garbage can. Then he carefully gathers those portions of food that he had chosen as being still usable, contemplates them grimly, then puts them on a plate, and, after some hesita-*

## ONE ACT PLAYS

tion, puts the plate in the icebox. He takes the garbage can and puts it outside door, R. He returns into the kitchen, but then a sudden fit of anger seizes him.)

GORDON

It's always the way! (*Tears off apron, throws it on the floor, and exits R, slamming door.*)

(*After a brief pause, the door at the rear, opening onto the back stairs, is cautiously opened, and Mrs. Sheffield enters quietly. She takes one swift look around the disordered kitchen, picks up dish-towel and apron from the floor, and sets to work rapidly to clean up. Then the back stairs door is again opened in the same stealthy way, and Mrs. Johns enters. The two ladies seem to take each other's measure with instinctive shrewdness, and fall into a silent, businesslike team-play in putting things to rights. Mrs. Johns takes charge at the sink, and the remaining dishes spin under her capable hands. Mrs. Sheffield takes them from her, rapidly polishes them, and puts them away on the shelves. There is unconscious comedy in the trained precision and labour-saving method of their actions, which are synchronized so that every time Mrs. Johns holds out a washed dish, Mrs. Sheffield is moving back from the cabinet, ready to receive it. They work like automatons; for perhaps two minutes not a word is said, and the two seem, by searching side-glances, to be probing each other's mood.*)

MRS. JOHNS

If it wasn't so tragic I'd laugh. (*A pause, during which they work busily.*)

## THURSDAY EVENING

MRS. SHEFF

If it wasn't so comic I'd cry. (*Another pause.*)  
I guess it's my fault. Poor Laura, I'm afraid  
I *have* spoiled her.

MRS. JOHNS

My fault, I think. Two mothers-in-law at once  
is too much for any young couple. I didn't  
know you were here, or I wouldn't have come.

MRS. SHEFF

Laura is so dreadfully sensitive, poor child——

MRS. JOHNS

Gordon works so hard at the office. You know  
he's trying to get promoted to the sales depart-  
ment, and I suppose it tells on his nerves——

MRS. SHEFF

If Laura could afford to have a nurse to help her  
with the baby she wouldn't get so exhausted——

MRS. JOHNS

Gordon says he wants to take out some more in-  
surance, that's why he worries so about econ-  
omy. It isn't for himself, he's really very  
unselfish——

MRS. SHEFF (*a little tartly*)

Still, I do think that sometimes—— (*They  
pause and look at each other quickly.*) My gra-  
cious, we'll be at it ourselves if we don't look  
out! (*She goes to the clothes-horse and rearranges  
the garments on it. She holds up a lilliputian  
shirt, and they both smile.*)

## ONE ACT PLAYS

MRS. JOHNS

That darling baby! I hope he won't have poor Gordon's quick temper. It runs in the Johns family, I'm afraid. I was an Armstrong before I married Gordon's father—I didn't know what temper was until I married—either my own or his.

MRS. SHEFF

I was a Thomson—Thomson without the P, you know, from Rhode Island. All families are hot tempered. All husbands' families, anyway.

MRS. JOHNS

Gordon's father used to say that Adam and Eve didn't know when they were well off. He said that was why they called it the Garden of Eden.

MRS. SHEFF

Why?

MRS. JOHNS

Because there was no mother-in-law there.

MRS. SHEFF

Poor children, they have such a lot to learn! I really feel ashamed, Mrs. Johns, because Laura is an undisciplined little thing, and I'm afraid I've always petted her too much. She had such a lot of attention before she met Gordon, and was made so much of, it gave her wrong ideas.

MRS. JOHNS

I wish Gordon was a little younger, I'd like to turn him up and spank him. He's dreadfully stubborn and tactless——

## THURSDAY EVENING

MRS. SHEFF

But I'm afraid I *did* make a mistake. Laura was having such a good time as a girl, I was always afraid she'd have a hard awakening when she married. But Mr. Sheffield had a good deal of money at that time, and he used to say, "She's only young once, let her enjoy herself."

MRS. JOHNS

My husband was shortsighted, too. He had had to skimp so, that he brought up Gordon to have a terror of wasting a nickel.

MRS. SHEFF

Very sensible. I wish Mr. Sheffield had had a little more of that terror. I shall have to tell him what his policy has resulted in. But really, you know, when I heard them at it, I could hardly help admiring them. (*With a sigh.*) It brings back old times!

MRS. JOHNS

So it does! (*A pause.*) But we can't let them go on like this. A little vigorous quarrelling is good for everybody. It's a kind of spiritual laxative. But they carry it too far.

MRS. SHEFF

They're awfully ingenious. They were even bickering about Junior's future mother-in-law. I suppose she's still in school, whoever she may be!

MRS. JOHNS

Being a mother-in-law is almost as painful as being a mother.

## ONE ACT PLAYS

MRS. SHEFF

I think every marriage ought to be preceded by a treaty of peace between the two mothers. If they understand each other, everything will work out all right.

MRS. JOHNS

You're right. When each one takes sides with her own child, it's fatal.

MRS. SHEFF (*lowering her voice*)

Look here, I think I know how we can make them ashamed of themselves. Where are they now?

MRS. JOHNS (*goes cautiously to door L, and peeps through*)

Laura is lying on the couch in the living-room, I think she's crying—her face is buried in the cushions.

MRS. SHEFF

Splendid. That means she's listening with all her ears—— (*Tiptoes to window, R.*) I can't see Gordon, but I think he's walking round the garden —

MRS. JOHNS (*quietly*)

If we were to talk a little louder he'd sit on the back steps to hear it——

MRS. SHEFF

Exactly. Now listen! (*They put their heads together and whisper; the audience does not hear what is said.*)

## THURSDAY EVENING

MRS. JOHNS

Fine! Oh, that's fine! (*Mrs. Sheffield whispers again, inaudible to the spectators.*) But wait a moment. Don't you think it would be better if *I* praise Laura and *you* praise Gordon? They won't expect that, and it might shame them——

MRS. SHEFF

No, no! Don't you see—— (*Whispers again, inaudibly.*)

MRS. JOHNS

You're right. Cunning as serpents and harmless as doves—— (*They carefully set both doors, L and R, ajar.*)

MRS. SHEFF

I only hope we won't wake the baby—— (*They return to the task of cleaning up, and talk very loud, in pretended quarrel.*)

MRS. JOHNS

Where do these dessert plates go?

MRS. SHEFF

On this shelf.

MRS. JOHNS

You're here so much more often than I, naturally you know Laura's arrangements better.

MRS. SHEFF

It's a lucky thing I *am* here. I don't know what poor Laura would do without me at such a dreadful time——

MRS. JOHNS

Poor Laura! I should say she's very fortunate, such a good husband ——

## ONE ACT PLAYS

MRS. SHEFF

I think it's rather sad for a girl who has had as much as she has, to come down to this ——

MRS. JOHNS

It's perfectly wonderful how Gordon has got on in business——

MRS. SHEFF

He ought to, with such a lovely home, run like a clock——

MRS. JOHNS

Yes. An alarm clock.

MRS. SHEFF

Well, I'm not going to see my daughter's happiness ruined——

MRS. JOHNS

I always knew he'd make some girl a fine husband——

MRS. SHEFF

Perhaps. But he seems to have picked the wrong girl. Laura has too much spirit to be bullied——

MRS. JOHNS

Well, perhaps it was all a mistake. Poor Gordon, he works so hard. I believe his hair is going white over his ears already.

MRS. SHEFF

Stuff! That's lather from where he shaved this morning. He's too slovenly to wash it off.

## THURSDAY EVENING

MRS. JOHNS

It isn't right that a young man should have to slave the way he does——

MRS. SHEFF (*apparently in a passion*)

Do you think that business slavery can compare to household slavery? I think it's heart-rending to see an attractive girl like Laura shut up in a poky little house doing drudgery and tending a baby. Think of it, having to take care of her own baby! Why, it's an outrage. If Gordon was half a man, he'd get her a trained baby nurse so she wouldn't have to *look* at the poor little thing——

MRS. JOHNS (*scathing*)

Yes, how sad that Gordon should have to entrust his son to amateur care when it needs scientific attention.

MRS. SHEFF

Poor darling Laura—she never ought to have had a baby.

MRS. JOHNS

Gordon is too intellectual to be bothered with these domestic details. He ought to be able to concentrate on his work.

MRS. SHEFF (*coming close to Mrs. Johns, feigning great rage, but grimacing to show it is merely acting*) Well, if you don't think my daughter is good enough for your son, I can always take her home with *me*. I guess I can find room for her, and we can put the child in an institution. (*Both nearly laugh, but recover themselves.*)

## ONE ACT PLAYS

MRS. JOHNS

Don't worry. *I'll* take the child. He's a Johns anyway, not a Sheffield. And you just watch Gordon, when he's relieved of all this family worry and quarrelling. He'll make his mark in the world. He's too fine to be tied down by a wife that doesn't understand him.

MRS. SHEFF

Oh, how happy Laura will be to hear this. My sweet, clever, attractive, economical, sensible little girl, free at last. Her married life has been a nightmare. That great, hulking, selfish man has tried to trample all the joy out of her. He sha'n't do it.

MRS. JOHNS

I never heard of a young husband as self-sacrificing as Gordon. I don't believe he *ever* goes out for an evening with other men, and he *never* spends anything on himself——

MRS. SHEFF

I think the way Laura runs her little home is just wonderful. See how she struggles to keep her kitchen in order—this miserable, inconvenient little kitchen, no gas, no pantry, no decent help. I think it's *terrible* she has had to put up with so much—— (*They pause, and listen at the door, L. The kitchen is now spick and span. Mrs. Johns makes a gesture to indicate that Laura is taking it all in, offstage.*)

MRS. JOHNS

Well, then, it's all settled.

## THURSDAY EVENING

MRS. SHEFF

Yes. As Laura's mother, I can't let her go on like this. A husband, a home, and a baby—it's enough to ruin any woman.

MRS. JOHNS

It's only fair to both sides to end it all. I never heard of such brutal hardships. Gordon can't fight against these things any longer. Throwing away a soup bone and three slices of bread! I wonder he doesn't go mad.

MRS. SHEFF

We've saved them just in time. (*They look at each other knowingly, with the air of those who have done a sound bit of work. Then they stealthily open the door at the rear, and exeunt up the back stairs.*)

(*There is a brief pause; then the door L opens like an explosion, and Laura bursts in. She stands for a moment, wild-eyed, stamps her foot in a passion. Then she seizes one of the baby shirts from the rack, and drops into the chair by the table, crying. She buries her head in her arms, concealing the shirt. Enter Gordon, R. He stands uncertainly, evidently feeling like a fool.*)

GORDON

I'm sorry, I—I left my pipe in here. (*Finds it by the sink.*)

LAURA (*her face still hidden*)

Oh, Gordie, was it all a mistake?

## ONE ACT PLAYS

GORDON (*troubled, pats her shoulder tentatively*)

Now, listen, Creature, don't. You'll make yourself sick.

LAURA

I never thought I'd hear such things—from my own mother.

GORDON

I never heard such rot. They must be mad, both of them.

LAURA

Then you were listening, too——

GORDON

Yes. Why, they're deliberately trying to set us against each other.

LAURA

They wouldn't have *dared* speak like that if they had known we could hear. Gordon, I don't think it's *legal*——

GORDON

I'm afraid the law doesn't give one much protection against one's mothers.

LAURA (*miserably*)

I guess she's right. I *am* spoiled, and I *am* silly, and I *am* extravagant ——

GORDON

Don't be silly, darling. That's crazy stuff. I'm *not* overworked, and even if I were I'd love it, for *you*——

## THURSDAY EVENING

LAURA

I don't *want* a nurse for Junior. I wouldn't have one in the house. (*Sits up, dishevelled, and displays the small shirt she has been clutching.*) Gordon, I'm *not* an amateur! I love that baby and I *am* scientific. I keep a chart of his weight every week.

GORDON

Yes, I know, ducky, Gordon understands. Soon we'll be able to buy that scales you want, and we won't have to weigh him on the meat balance.

LAURA

*Nobody* can take away my darling baby——

GORDON

It was my fault, dear. I *am* obstinate and disagreeable——

LAURA

I'll speak to Ethel about the garbage——

GORDON

Ethel's all right. We're lucky to have her.

LAURA

Gordon, you mustn't work too hard. You know you're all I have—(*A sob*)—since Mother's gone back on me.

GORDON (*patting her*)

I think it's frightful, the things they said. What are they trying to do, break up a happy home?

LAURA

We *are* happy, aren't we?

## ONE ACT PLAYS

GORDON

Well, I should say so. Did you ever hear me complain? (*Takes her in his arms.*)

LAURA

No, Gordie. It was cruel of them to try to make trouble between us—but, perhaps, some of the things they said——

GORDON

Were true?——

LAURA

Well, not exactly true, dear, but—interesting!—Your mother is right, you *do* have a hard time, and I'll try!

GORDON (*stops her*)

No, *your* mother is right. I've been a brute——

LAURA

I'm lucky to have such a husband--- — (*They are silent a moment.*)

GORDON

I suppose you'll think it an awful anticlimax——

LAURA

What, dear?

GORDON

Suppose we have something to eat?

LAURA (*happily*)

Good idea. Quarrelling always makes me hungry. (*They go to the icebox.*) I didn't really get any supper to speak of, I was worrying about everything so——

## THURSDAY EVENING

GORDON (*opening icebox*)

You mean *dinner*, honey—among refined people!

LAURA

Don't be a tease. Come on, we'll have a snack  
—— (*She discovers Gordon's plate of left-overs.*)

GORDON

Throw out that junk—I was idiotic to save it.

LAURA

No, Gordie, you were quite right. We must save everything we can. Four or five heads of lettuce would make a new shirt for Junior.

GORDON (*bewildered*)

Lettuce?

LAURA

I mean, if we saved that much, it would make enough money to buy him a new little vest. He's getting so *enormous*—— (*She puts plate of left-overs on the table, with some other cold food.*)

GORDON

There, now, this is better. (*They sit down at table.*)

LAURA (*thoughtfully*)

You know, Gordie, we mustn't let them know we heard them.

GORDON

No, I suppose not. But it's hard to forgive that sort of talk.

## ONE ACT PLAYS

LAURA

Even if they did say atrocious things, I think they really love us——

GORDON

We'll be a bit cold and stand-offish until things blow over.

LAURA (*complacently*)

If I'm ever a mother-in-law, I shall try to be *very* understanding——

GORDON

Yes, Creature. Do you remember why I call you Creature?

LAURA

Do I not?

GORDON

There was an adjective omitted, you remember.

LAURA

Oh, Gordie, that's one of the troubles of married life. So many of the nice adjectives seem to get omitted.

GORDON

Motto for married men: Don't run short of adjectives!—You remember what the adjective was?

LAURA

Tell me.

GORDON

*Adorable.* It was an abbreviation for Adorable Creature—— (*Holds her. They are both per-*

## THURSDAY EVENING

*fectly happy.*) I love our little Thursday evenings.

LAURA (*partly breaks from his embrace*)

Sssh! (*Listens.*) Was that the baby?

CURTAIN



REALLY, MY DEAR . . .



REALLY, MY DEAR . . .\*

CHARACTERS: A Poet, A Poem, Four Children, Five Women, known merely as A, B, C, D, E.

*Toward the footlights the room is pleasingly furnished as a conventional home, with chairs, rugs, bookcases, a table, and a door L. But about halfway up the stage, a white line is plainly marked across the floor. Beyond this line the stage is bare and everything seems to soften and fade off into vacancy. The back of the stage gives a strange effect of being open into infinite space. A blue backdrop and some delicacy of lighting give the illusion that the whole back wall has been removed, and the room merges imperceptibly into a suffusion of distance in which are undulations and ripples of enchanting blue and green and opal. This shimmering background must give a feeling of pure ether, endless in perspective and alive with transcendent suggestion.*

*A little way above the dividing line the POET sits at a small, plain table, three-quarters averted from the audience. He has sheets of paper in front of him and is staring vacantly at the blue depths of his imagination. At the back, toward the azure emptiness, four children dressed in bright little flimsy draperies are dancing softly and*

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## Off the Deep End

*slowly, in circles and to and fro. The pattern of their measure is light, fanciful, thoughtful, and serene.*

*A comes in L., straightens furniture, goes up to the white line and, taking care not to touch it, looks vaguely toward the back as though unable to see anything beyond the line. She calls.*

A: John?

*[At the sound of her voice the children instantly stop dancing, put black cloaks over their gauze kirtles, and come down to their side of the line, where they stand warily at attention, facing her but apparently not seeing her.]*

A: John, are you there?

POET (*without changing his attitude*): Yes.

A: Is everything all right, dear?

POET: I guess so.

A: May I come in a moment?

*[He does not reply, but the four children shift their positions, standing two and two to form a passage. She steps gingerly over the line, between the solemn children, who follow her as she goes to him. She speaks tenderly.]*

John, is she coming this afternoon?

POET: I don't know. How can I tell?

A: Well, I mean, do you feel as if she *might* come?

POET: Yes, I think so.

*[The children, hearing this, look at each other with faces of pleasure.]*

A: Oh John, I *do* hope she'll be everything you need.

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*[But as he remains moodily fixed on vacancy she pauses, hesitates a moment, and then returns toward the line. She holds out her hands toward the children as if to cajole them, but they are wary, and when she makes a sudden move to catch one of them the child evades her and skips lightly away. She catches only one of the black cloaks. She looks at it, throws it down sadly, and steps over the line. She sits, takes up a book, and reads. The children begin marching in file, very softly, round and round the POET's table, as though on guard. Then they gather by him, one sitting on the table, one leaning over his shoulder, all clustering close while he still keeps the same attitude.]*

*A bell rings. A goes to the door, L., and greets four ladies who enter, cheerfully voluble. They carry packages.]*

A: Why, how do you do! What a surprise!

B: I hope we're not interrupting.

C: We simply had to come.

A: I'm glad to see you.

D: My dear, what a cunning home!

E: We hadn't seen you since the great event.

B: I hope you weren't busy.

A: Not a bit. I was just reading some of John's poetry.

C: I've always been so crazy about his wonderful poetry.

D: I've always wanted to know what it's like to live with a genius.

E: Now you must show us everything.

B: It's wonderful of you to let us come in like this.

C: Where does he work?

A *[Steering them away from the white line]*: Careful,

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don't—— Here, come and sit down. [*She gets them safely seated, close to the footlights.*]

B: We've brought you some wedding presents.

C: All *useful* things. I think that's so much more sensible.

A: Oh, how nice!—But perhaps it isn't fair for me to take them. You see, we haven't been married.

D: Not been married!

E: My dear!

A: I don't think so. As a matter of fact, I'm really not certain. We've been so happy, I don't remember.

E: You must be mistaken, I read a note in the *Alumnæ Bulletin* about your having been married—

A: Well, perhaps we were. One gets confused about these things. We've been cohabiting anyway.

B: Really, my dear—

E: It's not the same thing at all. At least, not for the *Alumnæ Bulletin*.

C (*to D*): It seems impossible. Everything here looks so nice, so normal.

D (*to C*): D'you think we'd better stay?

B: And we took so much trouble picking out the wedding presents!

A: Can't you pretend they're cohabitation presents?

C: People don't give cohabitation presents.

E: Cohabitation is its own reward.

D: I think she'd better have them anyway. It looks better.

B: Certainly.

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C: If the *Alumnæ Bulletin* said she was married, no one will ever believe the contrary.

E: Better not give them a chance. Alumnæ are always eager to believe the contrary.

A: Then perhaps it's worth believing.

B: Don't be perverse, darling. [*Unwrapping parcel.*]  
Even if you haven't earned them, we've brought you some very choice things. [*She exhibits an alarm clock.*]

A: Oh, lovely! Just what we needed. John and I are so drowsy in the mornings, it seems almost impossible to wake up.

D (to C): She mustn't say such things.

C (to D): Well, it certainly isn't fair to say them to older women. [*She turns to A, unwraps and proudly displays a telephone instrument of the Continental type.*]  
There! I do hope you haven't got one already. It's one of the French ones.

A: Adorable! Like they always have on the stage.

C: They're very handy.

A: You can keep on smoking while you talk. Oh, I love it! They make everything sound so Belasco. The commonest appointment sounds like an assignation.

D [*giving a toy icebox, which she opens to show a cube of imitation ice, and miniature representations of meats, vegetables, etc.*]: Even if you aren't married, my precious, you have to eat.

E [*whose gift is a toy baby carriage*]: And even little bastards have to be wheeled about.

A: Darlings! You've thought of everything.

## Off the Deep End

B: One's friends always do.

A: We'll arrange these right away. [*She puts the gifts along the dividing line.*] This is the bedroom [*puts alarm clock toward R. side of stage*], this is the living room [*puts telephone at centre*], the kitchen [*puts ice-box at L.*], and—well, we haven't any nursery, it had better go here for the time being. [*Puts baby carriage beside the alarm clock.*]

C: If you have enough telephones and iceboxes and things around, it's as good as being married. It amounts to the same thing.

[*The children round the POET have shown signs of anxiety during the latter part of this conversation. They come down toward the line and look peeringly across it as though intuitively aware that something is happening which they cannot quite perceive or understand. But they do not yet see the visitors, nor the visitors them.*]

D: You said you were reading his poetry.

E: What is it, something new?

B: Oh, do read it aloud to us.

C: Poetry is so *intimate*, seems to take you so close to a person's thoughts.

A: It's the new book, hasn't been published yet. There's one thing here I'd love to read you.

D: Oh, do!

B: That would be such a privilege.

[*A picks up the book and opens it as if to read aloud from it, the others settle themselves to listen. A's lips move as if she is reading to them, but she utters no*

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*sound. And after a moment the others rise in a quiet, almost furtive way and begin snooping about. A lays down the book to watch them. Without wishing to drive the idea in too hard, it is suggested that what follows is the drama that transpires inside their minds while A is reading aloud to them.]*

C [*rather softly, like a conspirator*]: Now we want to know all about everything.

D [*walks along by the white line*]: This is the back wall?

A: That's not a wall, that's the equator. You see, on this side is *my* mind, and over there is John's.

E: How very extraordinary.

B [*incredulous*]: That is your husband— that's his mind over there?

A: Yes. Please be careful, don't interrupt him.

C [*they are peering across the line, as though looking into a mist*]: It looks perfectly blank.

B: Husbands' minds always—— I keep forgetting he's *not* a husband.

E: And this is yours? A mind of your own?

A: Of course.

D: Really, my dear, it's most irregular. [*To C*] For goodness' sake don't let this get into the *Bulletin*.

A: But haven't *you* got one?

D: Certainly not. Not in my own home at any rate. Things got so crowded, I had to fit it up as a nursery.

C [*still looking intently across the line*]: I can begin

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to see—— Oh, what lovely creatures! Gracious, have you got children already?

A: Oh, no, those are his Thoughts.

B: What darlings! Oh, I *must* look at them.

[*She steps across the line. The children run back hastily to the POET as if to shield him. He looks about vaguely, then concentrates again on his papers while they stand defensively round him.*]

A: They're rather shy, I'm afraid.—Oh, *please* don't; it's dangerous to go looking into other people's minds.

[*But in spite of her protest C and D have also crossed the line.*]

E [*looking around the downstage area*]: Haven't you any Thoughts?

A: Not real ones. At least John says not. I've got lots of little emotions and instincts and intuitions, but they're awfully well trained. They're invisible.

E: Much safer, I'm sure.

[*She also crosses the line. A, with a gesture of defeat, follows her.*]

A: John, darling, I'm so sorry,—they would come in.

[*The children put on their black cloaks again and come forward demurely, curtsying politely in unison.*]

CHILDREN [*one after another, to B, C, D, and E, with mechanical politeness*]:

How do you do?

How do you do?

How do you do?

How do you do?

B: Aren't they sweet!

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C: Such nice manners!

D: My dear, how well you've trained them!

E [*reaching toward one of the children*]: Sweetheart, won't you come and make friends?

1ST CHILD [*drawing away with dignity*]: I'm not interested.

B: Cunning!

2D CHILD: What did you come for? We were quite happy.

C: We brought you some toys, darling.

3D CHILD: We don't want any toys. We have our own.

D: The precious! So independent!—But don't you get lonely?

4TH CHILD: We dance.

[*The children perform a brief little sort of folk dance, making daintily mocking gestures toward the visitors.*]

E [*to A, who looks very unhappy*]: What a privilege to come right inside like this. It is interesting.

B: It's queer, isn't it. Funny, it doesn't seem furnished.

C: I should think you'd put down some rugs and have some chairs or pictures or bric-à-brac.

A: Oh don't you see, it's *his* mind.

D: But my gracious, you *live* in it, don't you?

A: Not all the time.

E: Goodness, you certainly ought to improve it, fix it up a little.

[*The visitors walk about inquisitively, the children keeping warily out of reach and between them and the* POET. *Each visitor is attended by one child. A stands*

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*and watches them, while the POET stirs and looks round uneasily from his table.]*

B: It's so different from what I imagined.

E [*in a voice of horror*]: Really, my dear, the place is positively dirty. It needs a thorough housecleaning.

C: Oh, I think it's pitiful. Don't you see, they're so poor they can't *afford* to furnish it properly.

D: We must do something to help.

E: Make it look homelike and—oh!

B: What?

E: It's all open at the back!

[*They look off horrified toward the blue vacancy at the rear.*]

C: How dreadful.

D: Heavens, that's awfully dangerous.

C [*to A*]: Darling, your little home is just dear, but do you think it's *wise* to have everything *open* like that?

E: Isn't it terribly draughty?

B: Now you mustn't mind our making suggestions. You see, we've had more experience.

D [*who has been looking off at the rear*]: And so high up, not even a railing, why, it's a perfect abyss.

C: You might fall out any moment.

E: Think of a man keeping his mind open like that. It's outrageous.

B: And look—those—those figures out there—[*She points toward the back where a glimpse is had of white forms moving in the blue mist.*]

C: Gracious. Is *that* the sort of thing he thinks about?

D: But the things poets write—are they real, or just

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fantasy? I mean—the kind of things—oh, you know—they don't really happen, do they?

E: Oh, how beastly you are. You don't understand.

[*During these remarks the children have shrunk from the visitors in dismay. They have gone over toward the R. at the rear, where they stand close together as though concealing something. A is beside the POET, who now rises to his feet and stands with an air of expectancy. He is only half aware of her, but puts his hand gently on her shoulder.*]

B [*looking toward A*]: Poor dear, I'm so sorry for her.

C: Never mind, we're going to help.

D: We'll make ourselves a kind of committee.

E: I adore committees.

B: What are those—those Thoughts doing over there?

C: They look very guilty.

D: I think they're trying to hide something.

[*They go over to the group of children.*]

E: They are! Now, Thoughts, what mischief are you up to?

[*The children hastily drop their black cloaks over something behind them, and run back to the POET.*]

A: Oh, don't! Don't interfere!

B: Nonsense, darling, we're here to be helpful.

[*She picks up the black cloaks, and they all utter a cry of amazement.*]

C: Oh!

D: Good heavens!

E: Mercy!

[*They bend over and raise the limp form of a young*

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*girl who has been lying there, concealed by a coverlet of some sort, in the blue shadows. She is apparently lifeless and is clad only in a chemise.]*

B: Gracious. Is she asleep or drunk or what?

A: Don't, don't. You'll hurt her.

C: But what's the matter with her?

D: She's ill, she needs treatment.

E: She's got scarcely any clothes on, the huzzy.

B: Lying around in underclothes, right inside a man's mind. Disgraceful!

C: Really, my dear. You allow this sort of thing?

A: Don't be silly. She hasn't been finished yet.

D: Hasn't been finished?

A: She's only half written. A rough draft.

B: She looks it. Wearing only one stanza.

A [*comes over to them*]: Poor dear! Isn't she lovely? He was crazy about her, but I think he's discarded her. He said her *cæsura* was all wrong.

E: Really, my dear——

A [*letting the lifeless form sink gently back on the floor and looking at it tenderly*]: I thought her lines were lovely but he said her assonance was too thin. [*Covers the figure.*] He may come back to her some day.

B [*to the others*]: This is worse than I thought possible.

C: She seems absolutely blind to the shame of it!

D: It's outrageous—inviting us in here and then showing us a thing like that!

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- E: If a man behaves that way in his own mind, what would he do in other people's?
- B: There's only one thing to do——
- C [*to A*]: Forgive me for speaking frankly. You'll simply have to occupy his mind with other things.
- D: So he won't have time to go philandering with— well, what you call rough drafts.
- A [*troubled*]: You really think so?
- E: If an unwritten poem looks like that, think of an unwritten novel!
- B: Yes, my dear, consider your responsibility.
- C: Better he shouldn't think at all than think things of that sort.
- A [*influenced by their certainty*]: Oh, it's hard to know. We were so happy.
- D: Remember, dear, never permit anything you'd be sorry to see mentioned in the *Alumnæ Bulletin*.
- E: These will help.  
[*The visitors hastily pick up the gifts they have brought and carry them over toward the POET's table.*]
- Surround him with these. [*She puts down the baby carriage near the table.*]
- B [*placing the alarm clock on the table*]: Don't forget to set the alarm.  
[*It goes off with a jangle.*]
- C [*bringing the telephone*]: This is useful too. You've no idea what a help it can be. It prevents too much thinking.
- D [*putting the icebox by the table*]: Lots of dangerous sonnets have been averted by a visit to the icebox.

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E: Now there must be some way of fixing that emptiness at the back. Have you got any screens we could put——

*[But at this moment there is a faint waft of music heard from behind, and the children run forward in an ecstasy of delight and begin dancing gaily. The POET, with a gesture of triumph, stands alert, his face toward the back of the stage.]*

A *[joyfully]*: She's coming! She's coming!

*[The children, frisking in a wild abandon of glee and expectancy, push A and the visitors down toward the line, and carry the alarm clock, telephone, baby carriage, and icebox over to one side of the stage.]*

B: What's happening?

A: She's coming. The new poem he's been working on.

*[The children run toward the back with arms outstretched in greeting. In the blue mistiness appears the graceful figure of a young woman dressed in a light, shimmery evening gown. The children run to her. She takes their hands and dances with them, a little symbolic dance, in which she seems now to run away while they pursue, and now to turn and draw them gladly to her. Finally she stoops and gathers them all into her arms.]*

1ST CHILD: You are beautiful.

2D CHILD: We hoped you'd come.

3D CHILD: We've been very patient.

4TH CHILD: He'll be so proud of you.

THE POEM: You mean, I'll be so proud of him. He invented me.

1ST CHILD: Hurry, darling. He's waited so long.

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*[Laughing and looking adoringly at her, they take her hands and lead her to the POET, who has been watching with grave happiness. She stands before him: a little wistful, a little shy, yet wholly radiant. He looks at her critically and tenderly, measuring her with his eye; touches her dress in two or three places as if assuring himself of its fit and fabric; pats her shoulder; twitches her skirt to adjust its hang. Then he opens his arms and she comes home to his embrace. The children dance merrily round them as they stand locked together. The POET sits down and takes her on his lap and they whisper passionately together.]*

*The visitors, standing close to the line, shake their heads with a scandalized air and look covertly at A, who is watching tenderly.]*

A: She's lovely, lovely! Oh, I'm so glad.

E: At any rate she's properly dressed.

A: He may want to change one or two of her adjectives.

B: Well, I hope he'll wait till we've gone.

A: Silly, he hasn't the faintest idea you're here.

*[One of the children runs to the side of the stage and fetches a rich, glowing cloak of flame colour, which the POET throws over the POEM. She poses in it before him; he puts his arm protectively about her and leads her off toward the back where they stand together in a haze of colours.]*

C: I suppose that means she's ready for publication.

D: I never saw anything so brazen.

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E: Really, my dear. You actually allow this sort of behaviour?

A: Allow it? I glory in it. What else am I here for, but to help him with his dreams?

*[She steps across the line, and the others follow her. As they come downstage, below the line, a curtain descends quietly behind them, exactly along the white line, cutting off the POET'S mind from the view of the audience. This curtain is painted with an amusingly formal and unreal representation of an interior, showing bookcases, furniture, windows, etc. There is an opening cut in it to serve as a doorway.]*

*If this device proves too laborious for the amateur producer, it will be sufficient merely to turn off all the lights at the back of the stage at the moment when the ladies cross the line and come back to A's portion of the stage.*

*They seat themselves exactly as they were before, when A began to read to them. A again takes the book, looks at it an instant as though just finishing her reading aloud, and lays it down.]*

B: That was wonderful, darling.

C: Marvellous. I've always been crazy about poetry.

D: A real inspiration.

E: I'm only sorry not to have seen the Poet himself.

B: But we've had this little look into his mind.

C: Isn't it extraordinary how they can invent all those things.

D: You really ought to give public readings. You made that seem so *real*.

## Really, My Dear . . .

E: It's been sweet to see you and find you so happy.

B: And now you're settled you *will* send your address to the *Bulletin*?

C: So some of the others can come to see you——

D: Well, dear, we must run along.

E: I'm one of those very rare women who really *do* go when they say they're going.

[*The POET appears at the opening in the curtain. Behind him the children are seen mischievously peeping out, but they do not come through.*]

POET: May I come in?

A: Oh, John, I'm so glad. They were just going.

POET [*To each of the visitors in turn, politely*]: How do you do?

B: I hope we haven't interrupted your work.

C: I've always been so crazy about your books.

D: A real inspiration.

E: We've just been reading something of yours. It made me feel as though I really knew some of your innermost thoughts.

[*The children giggle shamelessly in the opening.*]

1ST CHILD: Tell them to beat it.

2D CHILD: We want to go on with the game.

B: Are you engaged on anything very special?

POET: Oh, no—there's a poem on the way, but——

C: Do you like it?

POET: I do, rather, but it's not finished yet. There are always such a lot of unfinished things lying about.

D [*primly*]: Dear me.

E: We really must go.

## Off the Deep End

[*They utter a little babble of good-byes, to which A and the POET reply only perfunctorily. The children in the doorway wave good-bye derisively. The visitors, having hustled toward the exit, L., pause a moment, realizing that their hosts are no longer paying any attention to them.*

POET [*to A*]: She did come. She's wonderful. Come and see her.

[*And as they are about to go through the opening in the curtain, he adds:*] Of course, every woman is an unfinished poem.

[*They go off into his mind. The little group of visitors look at each other. They hurry off, L., saying:*]

B: Well of all the queer——

C: Perfectly outrageous——

D: The *Alumnæ Bulletin*——

E: Really, my dear——

CURTAIN

## THE CENTURY



## THE CENTURY

**I**N NEW YORK we think of the Twentieth Century Limited as just a train, but in Chicago she is an institution. The Century, as she is affectionately and familiarly called out there, makes her departure from the La Salle Street station with something of the circumstance of a crack liner leaving her pier. Visitors stand along the platform to see her off. Telephone booths, right beside her shining brass observation balcony, are busy until the last moment. There are even telephones in the observation car, disconnected at the final tick. That brass-railed platform at the end of the train seems, in those parting instants, as romantic as a Shakespearean set. The morale of the whole scene is magnificent. Porters have an air, and are double-tipped for it. The railroad conductor and the Pullman conductor, both stout, elderly, ruddy nabobs, confer like captain and staff captain on the bridge of *Mauretania*. She pulls out on the tick, and leaps at once into her long smooth stride. Behind you see the second section following, the big locomotive fluttering two green flags. I don't know how passengers, sitting softly in observation or club car, can settle down so promptly to the *Illustrated London News* or *Liberty*. It is all far too exciting.

And, just as in a big liner sailing from New York,

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as soon as you are off lunch is served. Going along the corridors you are thrilled by the intimate air of all those little compartments. Yourself, a mere occupant of a lower in the usual type of sleeper, feel a little humbled by those apartment-house cars that are all private cabins. You meet the train stenographer, he asks for your name "for the Train Register." "Oh," he says, "there's a gentleman looking for you, Mr. Soandso, a friend of Mr. Blank." (Mr. Blank has been your host in Chicago.) "What space have you got?" *Space*, I have learned, is the technical term for your location on a swell train. He tells me what Mr. Soandso's space is, so I can look him up. I am abashed to admit that I didn't: it was discourteous, but this was my first voyage in the Century and I wanted to brood.

Her morale, I repeat, is magnificent. In the diner the steward gives you a cheerful and apparently recognitory grin. "It's a long time since we had the pleasure of having *you* with us," he says, and of course I am subtly flattered to be thought an alumnus. The officers of this champion train are on generous terms with regular patrons. My friend Mr. Blank, who is an epicure, was once brought a parcel of codfish tongues by the conductor. There are fresh flowers on each table: a rose, two carnations, and a daffodil. The Century celebrates her twenty-fifth anniversary this spring. I suppose when she makes her quarter-century run, on June 15, there will be big doings. All sorts of things have happened on the roads since 1902, and will happen by 1952; yet, even in these spacious days of Tin Elizabeth the locomotive

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still gives us the greatest thrill. I hear much of King Ganaway, the Chicago photographer who has done marvellous pictures of engines. I hope he'll do the Century as she pulls out of La Salle Street on the morning of June 15th.

We make our first stop at Elkhart. It's fine to see a squad of oilers and coal-passers leap at the engine almost before she has come to a stop and begin hostlering her. You stroll up and down the platform for a brief inhale of windy March, try to savour the feeling of Indiana, the green little park, the Civil War statue. You admire the two rotund conductors, like Tweedledum and Tweedledee, still conferring. Then we're off again. The Second Section pulls in just as we leave. Do they keep it up like that, nip and tuck, all night?

The sweet brown fields of Indiana recede behind us. Chew Mail Pouch, Chew Bag Pipes; red cows, red pigs, red barns. And, if you have been spending a few days with a typical Chicago host, you suddenly find yourself strangely and peaceably weary. I guess there's truth in what the railroad claims about the water-level route: certainly the running is amazingly smooth. Going back to your seat in the car *French Lake* you find a fat white pillow put there by a fat black porter. You oblique yourself into it. Your mind goes back to the wonders of that amazing city. An apartment high over the lake, a night of gale and sleet, grilled casement windows looking onto the foam of perilous lakes forlorn. The roar of that fresh water surf sounds even above the roar of the fire in the great chimney throat. Like

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all genuine Chicagoans my host believes in going nature one better. His logs are treated with chemicals, the flames are blue and silver and platinum colour. In that gale and draught the fire burns through suddenly. You leave the room for a little while—when you come back it is all burned out; no softly glowing log to linger redly. In the elevator shafts of lake front apartments the gale screams a fierce æolian cry. I wish Shakespeare had known Chicago. And softly, with a little terror even, pondering these things, you fall asleep.

You wake up just entering Toledo. Again a chance for a swig of air. You are thrilled by strange names on cars and engines—*Nickel Plate Road, Hocking Valley, Père Marquette*. You buy a Toledo paper. An ad amused me—*Girls, carry a spare*. Stocking, they mean. It appears that life in Toledo is hard on hosiery, for you are urged to buy stockings “Three to the pair.” Then, if a run starts (says the ad) you take your spare from your purse and refill.—Just as I was losing myself in Ronald Fraser’s *Flower Phantoms* (what an enchanting book!) I noticed a pleasant town. The porter came by: what is this place, I asked him. “This is Elyria,” he said. That indeed had a Shakespearean sound. “What country, friends, is this?” “This is Illyria, lady.”

By dusk the train has settled down to so tranquil and domestic a routine that you have all the settled feeling of an ocean voyage. From the little compartments comes the sound of card-playing, bursts of cheerful mirth. Yet the Centurions are not too folksy, as on lesser trains. You are not approached, as I was on another limited once, to

## The Century

know if I'd make a fourth at bridge. I said I didn't play bridge. Well, how about poker said the other. I said I didn't play poker. "Do you play anything at all?" was his final attempt. Whatever it might have been I fear I'd have lost.

When you've had a light dinner, and read G. K. Chesterton in the *Illustrated London News*, and remembered to put your watch an hour ahead, you'll find your berth made up. You fall asleep just as you come into Erie.

What happens between Erie and Albany I have no notion. Usually I don't sleep much on trains, but I thank the Century for some eight hours vanished forever from my life—hours of complete nothing, a capsule of eternity. You wake, being on the starboard side, to see a half moon riding in pale light over a faint rosy epilogue of dawn. You smoke a pipe and pensively overhaul your belongings. Somehow you've lost your collar button, but (like the girls of Toledo) you had a spare with you. Your pride over this makes you quite pleased with yourself. You nap for another hour or so, and then orange juice and scrambled eggs.

I was sorry to see the last of our relay of locomotives leave us at Harmon. It would have been nice for her, I thought, to have had the honour of roaring us proudly to the very end. And I wouldn't have been myself, I reflected ruefully, if I hadn't immediately gone on to find a symbol in the matter. For it is just so with man throughout his life—he's frequently changing engines. For a while, Fun is his motive power; then Earning, or

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Ambition, or Love, or Family, all powerful moguls, keep him all steamed up. Perhaps it is the quiet electric engine, Peace, that brings him at last into his Grand Central Station.

IN GENEVA



## IN GENEVA

### I

YOU will have to be patient with me while I try to tell you about Geneva. Already it has faded into a sunny haze, through which I see a pale blue shimmer of the lake, white swans tacking against the lucid pour of the stream, little men in dark coats with brief-cases full of agenda papers. Those European brief-cases, of course, that fold over on themselves like large pocket-books, and have no handle. They contain papers so important, one supposes, that they must not be carried by a handle but hugged warmly against the ribs.

No one had ever told me—but then I find that hardly any one ever does tell me anything—about the Lake of Geneva. How it lies so still and reflective in its opal crater. Such beautiful dead water, with the soft sodden smell that fresh water always has to those of us who live by tidal salt. And then, under the bridges of Geneva you see that that water is dangerously alive. Why did no one ever tell me how it goes racing down into the Rhone, creaming and crisping against the piers of the bridges, swimming beneath your feet with such speed that you feel a little giddy and touch the hand-rail of the bridge for steadiness. So you realize that under all that stillness

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of untroubled blue there was this dreaming purpose, this constant anxiety for escape. Then you look differently at that level shimmer, where the punctual little steamers churn white furrows and sailboats hover like troops of butterflies. All that weight and colour of pictured liquid has intentions of its own, which have nothing to do with the cheerful tourists. Like all the still volume of thought in the mind, it moves in secret stream toward the fierce endless Now. What does Rousseau, sitting in effigy on his flat-iron islet, think of the philosophical analogies? The swift water divides about him with a hiss; the sharp prow of his island is like the nose of a destroyer racing in calm sea. Must philosophers always sit so, aghast in a downward rush of Time? The mind, prompt to invert phenomena for its own comfort, hastens to believe the water standing still, the island and the pretty trinket town steering busily upstream.

There was a queer feeling of having arrived in Geneva backwards, for at Ambérieu the train reversed itself and put on an engine at the other end. All the way up that gorgeous defile towards Culoz I had a queer sensation that we were going the wrong way. To the Long Islander, who has little enough dealing with great hills, that steep approach to Switzerland is good exercise for the nape. You crouch in the corridor of the car, cricking upward to see the sloping strata of gray and yellow cliff that overhang the train. Fine peaky jags of stone go spiring into the strong sunset light. You dare not praise these hills too much, lest the Alps themselves, when you see them, have no residue of surprise. But it seems a pity to

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be faring in a train, instead of on a bicycle along that magic road. In the dusk, in the aperitive hour, you reach Geneva at last. You are ready by now for almost any imaginable thrill. You would not be surprised if your bedroom window looked right off upon the shining sierras of Mont Blanc.

But Mont Blanc, as you soon learn, veils himself. You may pass a whole week in Geneva and never see him. And it was nothing picturesque nor historic that first caught my eye. It was a certain brand of tobacco, that comes in a blue tin, which I have sought in vain elsewhere on the Continent. The number and luxury of the tobacconists was my first thrill, and always that admirable but costly blue tin in the window. Then, rambling about in the evening freshness, you hear the orchestra playing on the terrace of the Café du Nord. You begin to feel the intense artificiality of this enchanting town.

I don't mean artificial in any derogating sense. The word that kept coming into my mind was *civilized*. Geneva is certainly the most sedulously trimmed, regulated, and finished city I have ever seen. It is so civil and comely, you forget the rough hills you crept under to reach it; you forget the incredible back-drop of the Alps behind it. All those neatly clipped parasol-shaped plane trees seem as though they should grow in green tubs. The town is as pretty, as neat, as well-wound as the little watches that tick in its handsome shop windows. Whatever resources, consolations, comforts, distractions, civilization has to offer (and they are many) are available there. The routine of the town's life seems to go on by

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silent wizardry. The streets are cleaned until they shine, but one does not see it being done. The tables are ready for lunch at the appointed hour. The latest books in three languages are in the bookshops punctually on publication day.

It is, to me, the most civilized town I have ever seen; I could not endure it for very long, for it is too perfect. Everything for instance that is, in American cities, wild, haphazard, and terrifying, has been settled long ago in Geneva. "Geneva, City of Refuge," says an inscription on an old, old tower, and indeed one has a sense of safe asylum, of having reached a stronghold of order where problems of traffic, transportation, drainage, education, piety, and everything else are well in hand. Like all good-natured and methodical people who seem to have no problems of their own, Geneva finds those of others unloaded upon her. But even international indignations seem to lose something of their sting in that gay and week-end atmosphere. Perhaps one reason why it seemed to me that Geneva was having a good time was that almost everyone there (except me) was having his expenses paid by someone else. The number of delegates, secretaries, journalists, propagandists, observers, touring commissions, function-eers of international peace, is almost incredible. I, representing no one, there merely as unprejudicated spectator, responsible to no one but my own curiosity, paid my share (even more than my share) of the drinks and listened attentively.

It will be difficult, it will be very difficult, not to give you some sort of false impression of Geneva. For there

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are comic phases that must be mentioned. But before approaching them it is necessary to say that one feels there a very real, a very thrilling sense of internationality. Where, on every hand, one sees the flags and faces of so many different peoples, one cannot remain rigidly convinced of the perfect rightness of any single clan. The United States, though not yet a member of the League, has made its great contribution. The one most important place I visited in Geneva was the Sporting Bar, an American grog-shop, which is the favourite rendezvous of the young diplomats, journalists, and second-string envoys of all nations. They and their ladies convene in this admirable place before and after all important meetings, and in a jabber of various lingoes fleet the time carelessly. There, more than in any discourse in the Salle de Réformation, you will hear what Norway, Uruguay, Germany, or the Serbs-Croats-Slovenes really think about the speech just made by Briand or Chamberlain. There you will seal surprising friendships in the course of the cocktail hour, and will encounter that lively Swiss aperitive the Bitter-Diableret. There you will hear discussed such hilarious matters as the painful schism that divided a party of American newspaper editors touring the Continent at the expense of the Carnegie Foundation. Some of the party thought one way about certain things, and some thought another. When one editor, at an official dinner in Munich, desiring to pay compliment to their hosts, delivered an impassioned eulogy on Beer, the social solidarity of the troupe was permanently fractured. There you will hear anecdote of the inside workings of the Secretariat,

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which will fortify your general theory of the human scheme. One thinks more gaily of the League when one knows it to be subject to the same ecumenical laws of comedy that operate alike upon Senators, Prime Ministers, and Bishops. There was the famous day when one of the stenographers of the Secretariat suffered a *crise de nerfs* and locked herself in the bathroom to brood. Her consœurs rattled and banged on the door, and besought her to come out, but in vain. At last they grew really worried, but one of them had the inspiration to cry "Lizzie, Lizzie! you're holding up the League!" which appeal to her sense of world responsibility was successful. The phrase has become classic in Geneva.

### II

I HAD never had any definite notion of what the League might look like, so my very first morning in Geneva I set off, with the most agreeable anticipation, to see if I could find it. I felt rather proud of not having tried, in any way, to get any sort of privileged or functioneering entrée. My mind was as open, as unblemished, as serene, as that bright day itself. It is true that I discovered in myself a pleasant sort of family or paternal sentiment in regard to the whole affair. Having been a hard-working editorialist at the time of the League's birth, I had written innumerable paragraphs in its favour; I felt that in my own small way I had contributed to its credit. The journalist mind (never yet adequately explored by psychology) is like that: in a very consoling and innocent

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egotism it likes to imagine itself an authority upon any topic it has ever editorially discussed. There were middle-Western newspaper editors in Geneva, wearied by a long expense-paid junket in pursuit of doctrine, who had long ago denounced the League as a chimera living at the foot of a rainbow. These editors felt it a personal grievance to find the League, undaunted by mixed metaphor, going busily about its affairs. One, bitterly surveying the throng at the Assembly, said, "These people remind me of the secretaries of commercial clubs in South Dakota." It is idle to say that editorials do not influence opinion. They often strongly influence the opinion of the people who write them, and I fear that an editor examines phenomena chiefly with an eye to corroborate what he has already said in print.

Therefore, I had honourably made whatever effort may be necessary to make one's mind a blank. Other than the natural exultation of a philosopher in discovering so ecumenical a microcosm under his eye, other than the ordinary human enjoyment of a prodigiously clement weather, I could trace in myself no outlines of fixed idea. I did not even make inquiry from any of the burly Vaudois peasantry who serve as Genevese gendarmes and look like figures out of *Punch and Judy*. The map of the town marked the Palace of the League of Nations; thither, after buying a walking-stick for forty cents, I made my way. The stick was my social gesture in honour of the fact that an old friend, whom I expected to meet presently, was on the permanent staff of the Secretariat. I felt that it was expected of me, and I used it stoutly

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so that when I should see my friend it would not look too *arriviste*.

The shining boulevard along the lake is rather like a toy Chicago, though Bill Thompson would be shent, if he were mayor of Geneva, by so many evidences of alier propaganda. My first failure as an internationalist, I realized, was my inability to identify many of the innumerable flags along that street of handsome hotels and apartments. But one very international symbol (also carrying a *carre*) was easily recognizable—a little squad of Charlie Chaplin dolls, somersaulting on the pavement for a peddling vendor. On the benches, among the bright geranium beds and trim *pelouses* of the park, the pretty girls of Geneva were reading books. A brisk career of well-groomed cars kept flowing along the street, cars which I vaguely supposed to be hastening on important international errands, but the gardened shore-line was pellucid indolence. The lake wearied the eyes with its brilliant level. Even the young women (and Geneva, I insist, has a chic of its own) did not seem wholly absorbed in literature. I had a feeling that they were simply marking time until more amusing affairs would begin; I wondered whether Lake Lemman might not be well named. These idle comments I join with you in reproaching; but I repeat that my mind was blank and candid; I was simply trying to get the feel of the place. Even in the Gardens of Gethsemane sweethearts may have sat one evening in the dark, heard strange footsteps and voices, seen torchlight flicker on the olive trees; shrunk closer

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together and thought little of it. He who does not admit such chances is no fit historian.

It did begin to strike me, however, as I approached the Palace, so-called, that all was singularly placid. Even with the highest optimism I had not imagined it possible that an international meeting could be so calmly conducted. The Villa Beau Regard, which adjoins the Palace, seemed to me the ideal place for a cosmopolitan-minded philosopher to settle down and write. Its charming garden, with big tasselled pine trees and deck-chairs standing on the lawn, lay open to the sunny forenoon. With the experienced eye of the householder I conned it through the railings; wondered whether it was a private home or used as some bureau headquarters; estimated its bedrooms and plumbing; imagined how agreeable some modern Voltaire or Rousseau would find it to pace those shrubberies and meditate his current chapter to the faint echo of the League's typewriters clicking from next door. If I were the League's publicity department I should set apart the Villa Beau Regard as a hostel for writers of liberal temper who might be invited to live there for a year at a time. The Bertrand Russells, the Romain Rollands, the H. G. Wellses, the John Erskines, might be advoled as creative guests. Thither could be brought the brooding Swede, the agile Japanee, the fantastic Hungarian, the courteous Brazilian, the groping and humorous Yank. At the heart of the cyclone, they tell us, is an area of quiet. The Villa Beau Regard, adjacent to the world's most controversial collection of filing cases, has an air of untroubled calm. I wish I knew who lives there.

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The Palace itself has the appearance of, and I daresay is, a bulky and flimsy old hotel—very much the Adirondack sanitarium of the McKinley period of architecture. On the low wall beneath the terraced gardens is a tablet, put there by the city of Geneva, to Woodrow Wilson, “Fondateur de la Société des Nations.” I should not have been surprised to see statesmen walking the garden paths, arguing delicate points of concession, and an admiring throng lining the precinct; but the enclosure was empty except for a gardener tidying the gravel.

The rear of the building, away from the lake, was evidently the business approach. Here, in the rue des Pâquis (Pasture Street) a few cars were parked, a Swiss policeman stood at the gate, young women of intensely secretarial aspect (including, I dare say, the Lizzie of the anecdote) came in and out. A gentle ticking of typewriters, but not at all urgent, drifted upon the soft air. A car rolled up and I waited anxiously, half expecting M. Briand or Sir Austen Chamberlain. Again it was a lady secretary, carrying a brief case. I began to think to myself that the League had very much the flavour of a convention of the Federation of Women’s Clubs. All these ladies wore, in a very concentrated and attractive quality, that special radiance of pleasure that the sex shows in any form of parliamentary doings.

Of course by this time I had begun to suspect, what I later learned to be so, that the Assembly of the League does not meet at the Palace at all, but at the Salle de la Réformation in quite a different part of the city. Of the Assembly in session I may say something presently. But I

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shall never be sorry to have had my first glimpse of the League in that informal way, when it did not suspect that anyone was looking at it. Lizzie and her colleagues were there on Pasture Street keeping up the files, while all the heads of departments were at the Conference. That, as much as anything else, showed me that the League is not a super-state, nor a chimera, nor even a rainbow, but a very businesslike organism. It is not entirely in the rostrum that the League is important, though as a sounding board it is valuable enough. The little advertised and conscientious work that goes into its investigations of such matters as the Settlement of Armenian Refugees, Cholera in Japan, Opium in Persia, memoranda on Coal, on Dumping, on the Artificial Silk Industry, or statistics of the Trade in Arms and Ammunition—these are the things that I think are worth meditation. It is true that an institution like the League sets up a standard to which professional joiners and pew openers are only too eager to repair. My acid colleague who compared some of the blue-bottles at the Assembly to the secretaries of commercial clubs was savage in intention, but I use his analogy to my own advantage. For I do not find the League a sentimental affair, but a cool, hard-headed, and Strictly Business proposition.

### III

THE hall is not large. It is about the size of a college auditorium, and panelled in a plain brown wood that gives it a sort of Lutheran feeling. The unofficial spectators, who have been admitted by little pink cards, are

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herded into a small section at the back of the ground floor, or in the rear end of the gallery. They are intensely serious, and a little indignant because they are not allowed to climb over into the press galleries, along the sides, which are only half filled. But the ushers are fierce. At the least sign of life on the part of the visitors they hiss violently. At first these hissings, sibilated from various parts of the dark and crowded little gallery, I took to be disapproval of sentiments uttered from the tribune. I was pleased at this apparent evidence of lively interest. But it was only the ushers. The Swiss, by long generations of training, have acquired a genius for keeping order. As janitors, herdsman, gendarmes, headwaiters, they are perfect. These ushers at the Assembly of the League of Nations were happy men. "You are begged not to applaud" they would cry, in a singular accent, if any of their flock showed animation.

In contrast to this discipline, the official parts of the hall, during the less important speeches, were amazingly informal. After the ringing of the big hand-bell, reminiscent of a farmhouse dinner call, the galleries are shut and the late-comers must content themselves with a peep through the glass doors at M. Vandervelde's whiskers or Herr Stresemann's naked poll. But on the floor and up the grades of the dais there is a constant to and fro. The young functioneers in spats are moving about and whispering. Seats were creaking, young women of great assurance, in free and easy sporting clothes, were on and off the high platforms, chatting with the presiding officers, delegates were greeting one another, newspapers being

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read. An unfortunate Italian was in the rostrum, reading his speech from manuscript in very gross French. It was delightful to see how all those who, for one reason or another, had occasion to cross the high-rising terraces behind the rostrum, took the opportunity to register themselves upon that particular junction of Time and Eternity. They would pause, knit the brows in strong torsion of intellect, glance broodily at a sheaf of papers, and come to some mythical decision. In the pews at the side, seemingly reserved for those of high rank, a few pensive statesmen sat in motionless trance. Even their mastery of the sessile arts could not disguise the appalling ennui of a mandarin's life. But the lively little gigolos and under-secretaries, whispering to and fro and dodging in and out through the brown curtains at the back, were having an excellent time. I began to suspect that somewhere behind that brown curtain was a bar; this, I learned later, was a fact. In one corner of the press gallery some sort of *homme d'état*, with cropped hair and cross-bar glasses, was cheerfully dictating a speech to an attractive young woman in mauve. They giggled together. The laborious Italian, whose French accent was a great encouragement to me, threw accents of pathos into his voice, but no one paid any attention. We had arrived at 10:30, and after what seemed a lifetime I gazed cautiously at my watch. It was only 11:40. I slipped cautiously out and went to the lobby to smoke and study the official publications of the League displayed for sale under the tablet in memory of John Huss.

In other words the Assembly of the League is like any

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other public meeting. When anyone with the right idea is talking it may be thrilling. When the bores have the floor it doesn't signify. That audience is subject to the hydrostatic paradox valid in all assemblies. A very small quantity of a fluid may exert a quite disproportionate power upon other quantities of fluid no matter how large. A very small quantity of human understanding can move a very large audience.

How well M. Briand understood that. Having first seen the Assembly at its worst (which, after all, was no worse than any conglomerate parliament) it was the more impressive to see it under the sway of a really magnificent speaker. The hall was quiet enough while he was on the platform. The matter of his talk seemed fairly trite—an impassioned plea for international patience and tolerance—but I was not there to analyze matter. I was there, responsible to no one but my own skull, to get the feeling of the thing. It was grand to see him, every display function at work, hands, voice, eyebrows, intonation. How well he knows that the more august an audience is the more it needs a chance to laugh. He strolled blithely to and fro, talking hard as he went; he paused to lean forward and speak directly to Herr Stresemann and the German delegation before him; he knew by perfect instinct when to evoke laughter, when to play upon solemnity. What did it matter what he said? Who was there who did not see in him, and relish, and applaud, something of the quality of France? What a sounding-board of transition, for the Frenchman, are such words as *ALORS*, or *ENCORE*. . . . With one of those words, rolled in sus-

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pending cadence as he passed from one mood to another, he held us in ecstasy. The whole accent system of the French language lends itself to the charms of declamation. And yet, with the shrewdest ease and simplicity he avoided the taint of the professional chrysostom, the too evidently calculated tropes and modulations and pauses. It was the perfection of paregoric skill, the speech that seems almost like a soliloquy. Even the ushers knew enough not to try to restrain the applause.

Part of the fun is to see all the delegates streaming out of the front door of the Hotel Victoria (attached to the hall) on their way to lunch. For the League is a very human institution, as I have tried to point out; well applauded was the wise interpreter who, when the hour for recess was long past, translated a somewhat lengthy peroration in these single terms: "Monsieur says if we don't adjourn we shall all be late for lunch." They come bustling out into that clear Geneva sunshine, past the newsboys shouting the Berliner *Tageblatt* and the Frankfurter *Zeitung*. (Frankfurter *Zeitung*? remarked a visitor from Dakota—What's he mean, that it's time for a hot dog?) What a kaleidoscope of beards, spats, monocles, Russians, Japanese, Italians. The ironic observer has then some inkling why the U. S. still abstains from the League, for in that panorama you see everything that a certain gland of the American mind is instinctively suspicious of—striped trousers braced up very high, short black coats, cross-bar glasses, beards, women with thick ankles, men with tangent knees, the German shape of knickerbockers, and bushes in green tubs (which always suggest liquor).

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They come garrulously out, with that special eagerness that the human race shows toward lunch time, hugging their brief cases and chattering together. The Big Boys step into limousines with little flags, the lesser fry go hurrying toward the Café du Nord or Carlo's Sporting Bar. You overhear little scraps of off-guard conversation. "He's a double-dyed Englishman," remarked an elderly French official to his secretary. "Is that Austen Chamberlain?" said an American. "He looks like Niagara Falls." "I want to know who all these people are," said a lady, impressed by this amazing flux of cosmopolitanism that went streaming by us. "They'd tell you fast enough, if you asked them," was her companion's reply.—Just across the street my eye kept catching the brightly coloured posters of Hagenbeck's Circus.

I hope I haven't seemed too scherzo. No man in his senses would make light of the work the League is trying to do. It is a very human organization, a trifle over-run with volunteer pew-openers, but infinitely appealing to any serious observer who will take the time to see its gallant and painstaking attempt to organize international decency. But also, to the unembittered plebe, some of the by-play of diplomacy is extraordinarily amusing. It was in Geneva that I first heard of Harold Nicolson's gorgeous book *Some People*, which plays such delicate mirth on Foreign Office themes. Not even Max Beerbohm has a wickeder eye for civilized merriment.

WAGON-LITS



## WAGON-LITS

*A very tiny compartment in a French sleeping-car. At the back, door into the corridor of the car: Left, two berths, one above the other. Right, door into lavatory. Below it a small armchair. Just about room enough for two people to stand side by side. A large dinner bell is rung, off, and a voice is heard.*

CONDUCTOR: En voiture, messieursdames!

[*Enter at the back, HENRY and KATHLEEN. American tourists on their honeymoon, followed by a very villainous looking Swiss porter, in blue smock and heavily bearded, carrying luggage slung on a strap over his shoulder.*]

PORTER: Voilà, Monsieur.

HENRY: Thanks. I mean, mercy, mercy. Here. Quelque chose pour vous. [*Hands him money.*]

KATHLEEN: Oh, darling, isn't this *cunning*? Think of being in a French sleeper! What fun!

PORTER [*holding out money scornfully*]: Monsieur se trompe. L'argent français ne va pas en Suisse.

HENRY: What's he jabbering about? I gave him a whale of a tip. He's crazy. J'ai donné vous beaucoup, beaucoup.

KATHLEEN: Perhaps you gave him French money. We

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shouldn't have spent all the last of our Swiss money in that café.

HENRY: He can change it, can't he? Gosh, I can't remember everything. [*Gesticulates to porter.*] Beat it! Vous êtes riche.

PORTER: Madame, les valises étaient bien lourdes, Monsieur ne m'a donné que quelques sous——

HENRY: Oh, Hell. Enfer! Here, take all I've got. [*Gives him pocketful of small change.*]

PORTER: Bien, Monsieur. [*Exit.*]

[*Horn blown, off.*]

HENRY: Not much room, is there. I wonder if there is a club car where we can sit for a while. It's too early to go to bed.

KATHLEEN: It's like being in a bird-cage.

[*Door opens. CONDUCTOR puts his head in, and solemnly blows a little squawking instrument at them.*]

HENRY: Yes, and there's the parrot.—Have a cracker?

[*CONDUCTOR looks at them with dignity, and exits. The squawking sound is heard again outside.*]

HENRY: I suppose that means we're off.

[*Looks toward footlights as though peering through window.*] Yes, here we go.

KATHLEEN: I think it's marvellous how well you understand everything. Darling, you're wonderful! You really learned all your French in three weeks from the Doubleday advertisements?

HENRY: Sure. But I'm damned tired of scrambled eggs. Oofs broolay! That's the only food those ads tell you how to order.

## Wagon-Lits

KATHLEEN: Never mind, darling, some day a big French scrambled egg man will come to town. The boss won't be able to talk to him, and you'll take him out to dinner and close the contract.

HENRY: Where the deuce are we going to put these bags? They're too big to go under the berth. My God, travelling isn't what it's cracked up to be.

KATHLEEN: But think of being in a French sleeping-car on our honeymoon. Gee, I certainly am a lucky girl.

[*Low comedian, as sleeping-car attendant, opens door.*]

L. C.: *Monsieur*! Vous avez tout ce qu'il vous faut?

HENRY: What's he want? I wish they wouldn't talk so fast. Vous parley trop vite!

L. C. [*puzzled*]: *Monsieur*?

KATHLEEN: He probably wants a tip.

HENRY: I gave the other guy all my change. [*Gesticulates to L. C. to indicate that he has no money, turns out his trouser pockets.*]

KATHLEEN: Don't make him angry, darling. Suppose we were ill in the night. Here, I've got some. [*Gives L. C. money.*] Pour vous!

L. C.: *Merci bien, Madame.*

KATHLEEN: Ask him if there's any place where we can sit down awhile.

HENRY: Hum. Hey, *Monsieur*, vous avez club-car dans ce train?

L. C.: *Monsieur*?

HENRY: Gosh, he can't even understand French.—Une place où *Madame* peut—how the devil do you say sit down?—où *Madame* peut etre comfortable?

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L. C.: Mais si, mais si! Le double-V. Voilà, Monsieur.  
[*Points to door of lavatory.*]

HENRY: Dooblah-Vay?

L. C.: Oui, Monsieur.

KATHLEEN: I think he's talking about the—the bath-room. That's what the chambermaid at the hotel called it, the doublah-vay.

L. C. [*delighted to be understood*]: Oui, Madame. Vous savez le doublah-vay appartient aux deux salons, ne laissez pas l'autre porte fermée.

HENRY: Yes, yes, the doublah-vay. Je comprends. Wee wee!

L. C. [*opening door of lavatory, explaining*]: Voyons, le monsieur dans l'autre coupé a aussi ses nécessités naturelles, n'est ce pas? Après faisant usage du cabinet, vous laisserez la serrure ouverte.

HENRY: He seems to want us to go in there. They're extraordinary, these people. Nous comprends, wee wee. Plus tard, plus tard.

L. C.: Bien, Monsieur. [*Exit.*]

KATHLEEN: I guess there's nothing to do but go to bed.

HENRY: We'll never be able to unpack those bags in here. If I open 'em I'll never get 'em shut again.

KATHLEEN: Let's go to bed as we are. Don't bother about nighties. I don't mind.

HENRY: Those berths look awfully small.

KATHLEEN: Never mind, darling. Think of it, in a few hours we'll be in France!!

HENRY: Yes, they must have some decent beds there. At least that's what I've always been told. [KATHLEEN

## Wagon-Lits

*starts to undress.*] I'll go out in the passage; give you room to undress.

KATHLEEN: You won't be gone long, darling?

[HENRY *exits*. KATHLEEN *disrobes*. Enter CONDUCTOR.]

CONDUCTOR: Pardon, Madame. Il faut vous avertir que la visite de douane aura lieu a Bellegarde, vers minuit——

KATHLEEN: Go away! How dare you come in without knocking?

CONDUCTOR: Madame, la visite de douane——

KATHLEEN: Tell my husband. I don't understand.

CONDUCTOR: Ve visit you here; it is ze custom——

KATHLEEN: I don't like the custom. Go away!

[*Exit* CONDUCTOR. KATHLEEN *goes into lavatory*. *Voices heard, off.*]

CONDUCTOR: Pardon, Monsieur, mais c'est defendu de se stationner dans le couloir.

HENRY: Wee wee.

CONDUCTOR: Il ne faut pas fermer la porte, parce que la visite de douane——

HENRY: No comprong. Oofs broolay!

CONDUCTOR: I tell Madame, ve visit her in bed during ze night; it is ze French customs——

HENRY: It's a hell of a custom. Wee wee, wee wee.

[*Enter* HENRY. *Sees that KATHLEEN is not there, looks anxiously under berth, then taps at door of lavatory.*]

KATHLEEN [*within*]: Go away, you horrible creature! I'll tell my husband.

HENRY [*tenderly*]: All right, darling. This is Boydie.

KATHLEEN [*within*]: This is Teenie.

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[HENRY *begins to undress.*]

KATHLEEN [*within*]: Darling, I haven't cleaned my teeth. I hope you won't mind. [*A pause.*] I'll be out in a moment, Boydie. Are you impatient? [KATHLEEN *emerges in her chemise.*] Oh, darling! You were gone such a long time. [*Embraces.*] Oh, you frightened me so. I thought it was the conductor. He said he was going to visit me in the night.

HENRY: I'm damned if he will. [*Locks the door.*]

KATHLEEN: But that does sound as though we were getting near France, doesn't it. [*She gets into lower berth, he undresses.*] Boydie, do all Frenchmen have beards? Do you suppose their wives like it?—Oooh, it's awfully cold in these sheets without anything on.

HENRY: I don't suppose they grow them until they've been married quite a while.

KATHLEEN: Well, if I ever see you growing a beard I'll know what to think. My, this train goes fast, doesn't it? I'm just rattling around in this berth. I wish we hadn't drunk so much dinner. It's made me sleepy.

HENRY: I thought we might as well get rid of that Swiss money.

KATHLEEN: It seems such a waste of time to be sleeping on a trip like this.—Wouldn't the folks at home be surprised if they could see us now? What do you suppose they're doing?

HENRY: At the movies, most likely.

KATHLEEN: I wonder what's on at the Paramount this week? Oh, Boydie, wouldn't it be swell to be just

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going in to the Paramount, and then Roseland afterwards, and a stack of wheats at Childs! You know I don't think any of this wine they give you over here is near as good as a nice pineapple caramel soda.

HENRY [*climbs into upper berth*]: Maybe we can get a soda in Paris.

KATHLEEN: There was a new Harold Lloyd release announced that ought to crash through just about now.

HENRY: Yeah, but they won't get that over in this damn country for a hell of a long time. Gosh, it was terrible! All the pictures they were showing in Geneva were as old as mothballs. The only decent thing we saw on the whole trip was that Greta Garbo in Florence.

KATHLEEN: Yes, that was real cats. Was that United Artists?

HENRY: No *sir*, that was Metro-Goldwyn. If that bird Mussolini was a real statesman he'd tear down some of those old ruins and colosseums and build a real picture house. It's depressing to see so many old ruins about. It gives people a bad reaction; it hurts business.

KATHLEEN: Do you suppose the folks are really at the movies at this minute? There's a difference in time, isn't there? It's only about three o'clock in Bronxville.

HENRY: Sure; they're just getting ready to take in the afternoon show.—Well, I guess a fellow's got to travel sometimes; it opens up the mind.

KATHLEEN: Are you all right up there, darling? Your sheets aren't cold? Perhaps I ought to come up and warm them for you.

HENRY: I'm all right. I'm going to read this French

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time-table. It gives all the dope about crossing the frontier. I'm not going to let these frogs put anything over on me. [*Opens time-table booklet and begins to read.*] You know these French timetables are really a scream—"Among the baggages that may accompany the passenger into the compartment is a baby's bathtub."

KATHLEEN [*sleepily*]: It would have to be a very small baby.—Boydie, do you suppose we'll have a little baby some day?

HENRY: Not if we travel in trains like this.

KATHLEEN: Heavens, what's that?

[*A knocking on the door.*]

HENRY: Your friend the conductor, I suppose. Good Lord, you didn't encourage him, did you?

KATHLEEN: Don't pay any attention.

HENRY: It might be something important.

[*Leans out from his berth and unbolts door, which opens to reveal 2D HEAVY, as an anxious but very polite foreigner, bearded, in nightshirt and nightcap.*] Gosh, it's Santa Claus.

2D HEAVY: Pardon, Monsieur—Madame, je suis fâché de vous déranger mais vous m'avez fermé la porte, je ne peux pas visiter le cabinet——

HENRY: Listen—we don't want visitors. No visite, no visite.

2D HEAVY: Mais, mon Dieu, on ne peut pas passer par la porte——

KATHLEEN: Passport! He wants to see our passport!

HENRY: Oh, I get you, Steve. [2D HEAVY *tries to come into the compartment.*] Now, wait a minute; don't be

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in a hurry [*pushes him back*]. Where the devil did I put that damn thing? [*Leaps out of bunk, rummages in his clothes.*]

KATHLEEN: Boydie, it's in my purse. I'll get it. [*Starts to get out of bed, jumps back with a scream, remembering her attire.*] He's coming right in. Get out, you wicked old man!

2D HEAVY: Bêtise, tonnerre! Vous avez fermé la porte, la porte du cabinet, cabinet de toilette, lavabo, comprenez-vous?

HENRY [*showing passport*]: No comprong, no comprong. Here you are—passport, passport; all OK. Mr. and Mrs. Henry Nordic, Bronxville, N. Y.

2D HEAVY [*in despair*]: Gott, er ist verruckt. La porte du cabinet, fermé de mon côté.

HENRY: He's cuckoo. [*Imitates sound of cuckoo clock.*]  
Oofs broolay!

[*With a cry 2D HEAVY pushes past and rushes into the lavatory.*]

Oh, the good old doublah-vay. Well, that's what I call hospitality!

KATHLEEN: Oh, I'm afraid it's my fault. I locked the other door. You see, the bathroom belongs to both compartments.

HENRY: Good Lord! Well, live and learn. [*Locks both doors and returns to his berth. Reads aloud from timetable.*] "In view of avoiding all difficulty and all delay at the time of the passage at the frontiers, Sirs the Voyagers have interest to make to the agents of the customs declarations exact and complete of the contents

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of the baggages"! Say! Those Fatimas we bought in Geneva—where did we put them? [*No answer; he looks down from his berth and sees that she is asleep.*] Oh, well, the devil with it.

[*He turns out the light. After a moment's pause there is a heavy pounding on the door.*]

KATHLEEN: Judas, what is it now? [*Switches on the light.*] Don't let him in again. I shall have hysterics.

HENRY [*opening door a crack*]: What do you want? This isn't a comfort station.

[*Enter two customs officers in uniform.*]

1ST CUS.: La visite de douane, Monsieur.

2D CUS.: Vous n'avez rien à déclarer?

HENRY [*pointing to door of lavatory*]: Dooblah-vay, dooblah-vay!

[*The officers look at each other, then open door of lavatory and look in suspiciously.*]

1ST CUS.: Ce sont des étrangers. Américains?

HENRY: Wee wee. Mr. and Mrs. Henry Nordic, Bronxville, N. Y.

2D CUS.: You 'ave nozzing to declare? No jewellery, precious stone, cigars, cigarettes?

HENRY: Wee wee—I mean No, not a darn thing, except about half a pack of Fatimas.

1ST CUS.: You pardon, we make research.

[*Researches into the upper berth.*]

HENRY: Hey, stop tickling me. [*Leaps out of berth.*]

2D CUS.: Madame, she remove herself also from ze bed so ve can pay tribute to her honesty?

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[KATHLEEN, *modestly draping a blanket round her, emerges from the berth as they rummage in it.*]

1ST CUS.: Mais, Madame, vous êtes charmante! Monsieur, you are ze lucky man.

2D CUS.: You may smoke ze liddle half-pack of Fatimas in honour of so lofely wifemate. It is perhaps your first time in la France?

KATHLEEN: I think they're darlings! Is this really the frontier?

1ST CUS.: Oui, certainement, Madame!

HENRY: Hot dog—I mean, oofs broolay!

KATHLEEN: Boydie, we're in France! [*She embraces*  
1ST CUS.]

CURTAIN



MLLE DE SOMBREUIL

## MLLE DE SOMBREUIL

### I

**I**F I should ever blossom into a writer on crime and gallantry, it would all be due to L. S. H. One day, a couple of years ago, I received a charming note from those initials (of whose identity I know nothing) asking if I would care to accept some French books there was no room for on L. S. H.'s shelves. Somewhat tardily, and even I fear without very mannerly enthusiasm, I replied that if there were anything L. S. H. really wanted to be rid of and thought I would be excited about, I should be very happy, etc. Presently arrived a vast packing case by express. Already incapable of dealing with surplus volumes, I was so appalled at the size of the box that it lay unopened for many weeks before I had courage to find tools and burst it. And then the amazing happened. The box was stuffed full of treasures. I could fill this page several times over just in telling you what was in that box. And, knowing neither L. S. H.'s name nor address (there was a card, but I've lost it) I've never been able to say any decent word of gratitude nor describe the good times I've had.

For, among many other things of quite different sort, there were a lot of French books on crime and oddity.

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*The Memoirs of M. Goron*, for instance, the famous Parisian Chef de la Sûreté. The books of Dr. Cabanès: *Curiosités de la Médecine, Poisons et Sortilèges, Les Indiscretions de l'Histoire*, etc. But, most priceless of all, a long run of Bataille's annual series of *Causes Criminelles et Mondaines*. Of these I sing. All beautifully bound in red leather, a complete file from 1880 to 1898, dealing with every horror and humour of the erring world (as only French criminologists can) they make the Arabian Nights seem pale. There is no need for me to lament the passing of Sherlock Holmes, the ignoble dearth of good shockers. As a mine of horrid plots, an encyclopædia of low humour, or a stimulus for grisly nightmare, Bataille is the man for me. The comedy of some of his mundane causes makes our smartest weeklies mere Sunday School talk; and the purging horror of some of the crimes is far beyond the rue Morgue standard. I know now, also, where some of our modern writers on murder got their stuff.

These cases, mind you, are not literary re-writes. They are transcript of actual testimony and official proceedings. What fodder for winter nights! I hope I shan't be accused of being "quaint" when I say that to pour out a good tall one of brandy and hot water, stretch one's feet toward the fire, and settle down to the *Affaire Peltzer* or the *Affaire Chambige*, is a pretty good way to spend an evening. The real connoisseur of crime, nurtured on *Causes Criminelles et Mondaines*, will never again take poor darling Sherlock too seriously. I blush to admit it, but really, you rise from Bataille a better man—and thoroughly scared.

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If I go steadily on, there will not be one colourful crime committed in France, from 1880 to 1898, that I don't know about (except that by excess of reading I get the details mixed, and accuse the man who only stole corpses from the cemetery of having been the one who pushed his mother-in-law into the fireplace). I shall have learned a good deal of French too, though not all of a sort that I can use. What gorgeous titles in that collection of tales. Consider:

Paris infâme: une mère proxénète  
Les Trois Modistes du Comte de la Mothe  
La Paternité du pharmacien Blandet  
Le Vampire de Saint-Ouen  
La Belle Coutelière de Thiers  
La Jeune Fille au Perroquet  
Les Assassins du Curé d'Armentières  
Les Faiseurs d'Anges de Langogne  
Le dernier amour d'un vieux turfiste  
M. et Mme. Stern: un ménage américain  
La Machine infernale de Saint-Julien  
Une Femme Enterrée dans le champ de bataille de  
Waterloo  
L'Homme aux 54 Enfants

If there are any tabloid publishers in the house, these ought to make their mouths water.

But these cases are not all ablative. Bataille is not all Murder and Sudden Death. If we might be permitted a little excursion into low life, I can't resist the story of Mlle de Sombreuil. Any lover of Paris must feel kindly

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towards her. Poor dear, how often they deported her and how resolutely she came back to the town she understood. M. Bataille calls it a "tintamaresque history" and says, rather disconsolately, that it shows what a state of social decomposition there was in the year 1886. But I think Bataille is just a little less than gallant to the lady. She hadn't much chic, which no Parisian can quite forgive. She was a blonde, perhaps that's how she got away with it.

Poor Mlle de Sombreuil. In the first place she had no birthright to the aristocratic name. Her father was a German merchant in Constantinople, and her real name was Louise Schneider. But even that we can't swear to, because (one of the amazing little by-stories that crop up in these affairs) one of her brothers swore she was a changeling. It was reputed that Herr Schneider's nurse, taking baby Louise for an airing, allowed her to fall into the Black Sea where she drowned. Afraid to confess this to her philoprogenitive employer, the nurse bought a Circassian baby and substituted it. I like this legend: if our Mademoiselle was a Circassian that will condone much. But whether Circassian or German, Bataille has to admit that she was "Parisienne et boulevardière dans le sang."

She's a little the worse for wear as we first see her in court (November 26, 1886). She gives her age as twenty-eight, but M. Bataille says the court clerk is still laughing at that. He says she looks a bit like an elderly nursemaid, her complexion is leaden and she is "insolently" powdered. She's wearing a tight little "jaquette

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à capuchon" (I'm not quite clear just what that looks like) and over her yellow chignon is a hat with swan's plumes—symbol of innocence, says the ironical Bataille. But her gloves are fresh and clean, and I like that in her.

Well, here you are again, says the judge, and we learn the sad fact that this is Mademoiselle's fifth appearance before the law. The first time she was given a month for blackmail; the second, a month for "détournement d'objets saisis." Does one translate that embezzling? or disposal of stolen goods? Anyhow, after the second affair she was expelled from the country as an undesirable alien. She was told to elongate herself from France. Twice already she has returned, after her elongations. Now for the third time she is back in Paris. M. Chérot, speaking for the state, says she is an adventuress. She is a dangerous and violent woman. While awaiting trial she threw a piece of bread in the matron's face and said that there would be heads broken. The case, says M. Chérot, is vulgar and sordid. It's simply a matter of a *filie entretenue*, already several times expelled, who defies the law and deserves a severe lesson.

But, as you may have suspected, there's a reason why this little story—classify it how you will—rises high enough for the pages of Bataille who requires a certain celebrity in his causes. Poor Mademoiselle happens to have been a very particular friend of Mr. Vergoin, a well-known lawyer and a member of the Chamber of Deputies—as we would say, a congressman. And so, treading

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lightly and briefly, let us follow Mademoiselle's very witty counsel, the famous Maître Demange.

She came to Paris at eighteen, says M. Demange. Her heart was ardent, her head was hot. It was the fault of the sunshine of Circassia, he suggests. She fell in love with M. de Sombreuil, who deserted her with a baby. So perhaps our Mademoiselle did earn a right to the name she clung to, and for which M. Bataille chaffs her. What became of the baby, the report does not tell. As far as our story is concerned it falls into the Black Sea of oblivion. But M. Demange says she was a good mother, and for two years she struggled against misery. Then, a dramatic shift. A money-changer of Lyons introduced her to the wealthy M. Féder, director of a famous bank. This bank was on the verge of a crash, though poor Mademoiselle didn't know it. M. Féder installs her in a "coquettish little apartment" in the rue de Constantinople. (I seem to see a touch of sentiment here. Surely our Circassian is not as hard-boiled as they pretend.) But M. Féder's bank failed, with a resounding scandal. M. Féder skipped out and left Mademoiselle with a lot of expensive furniture unpaid. Mademoiselle, exasperated (it is M. Demange's word) tried to get money out of Marieton, the Lyons money-changer who had introduced Féder to her. Apparently her methods were direct: anyhow she was sentenced for blackmail, and also served with a decree of expulsion.

She returned to Paris to get her baggage. During her absence her effects had been sold. She tried to commit suicide: she shot herself, aiming at the heart (her region of least resistance) but the wound was not fatal. When

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she came out of the hospital they put her in prison for one day for not having obeyed the decree of elongation. But her mercurial temperament came to her rescue. She met a gentleman, a négociant, who evidently saw she needed building up. He took her to Tréport, that cheerful little Norman watering place. I like to imagine them there. But the money-changer heard about it. He seems to have been a skunk, that discreditable Lyonnais. There is probably more than we know behind their relations: but anyhow he was indignant to learn that she was enjoying herself at a balneary station. He had her arrested and again she was jailed for being still in France. Coming out of jail, however, she lived happily with her négociant for two years, at 14, Avenue Hoche. As the delightful Demange puts it—

Quand elle conjugue le verbe *aimer*, on la laisse en repos; mais quand l'amant, quel qu'il soit, se fatigue, on met à exécution l'arrêté d'expulsion. C'est ce qui advint encore quant le négociant eut assez d'elle. Aussitôt les agents du ministère de l'intérieur reparurent et invitèrent Mlle de Sombreuil à déguerpir.

To M. Vergoin, the deputy, our harassed Mademoiselle had gone, with a note of introduction from her previous lawyer, to try to get some mitigation of her decree of exile. Exile from Paris, from its dear life of terrasse and apéritif, of café chantant and coquettish little apartments—not to be thought of! Oh happy days in the Avenue Hoche—sunset in the wide space round the Arc de Triomphe, and all the little dogs being taken for

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walks along the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne! There's an Unknown Soldier now under the Arch of Triumph, but I see our Mademoiselle as an unknown soldier too, in her own peculiar warfare. The Siege of Paris! Perhaps there *was* German blood in her.

Anyhow, to M. Vergoin she repairs. And M. Vergoin, the influential congressman, makes representations in the department of the Interior, and Mademoiselle's elongation is suspended. And as you can imagine her gratitude is warm. In the case of our Mademoiselle, gratitude takes its most personal coefficient; and besides, chic or not chic, M. le Député had fallen for her charms. Moreover Mademoiselle, by this time, was beginning to see the great truth that Maître Demange points out in his witty plaidoirie. As long as she is living with someone she is safe; the moment she falls, so to speak, into the public domain, she will be elongated from the city she loves. Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Circassia.

M. Vergoin sets her up at the Hôtel des Capucines. I don't quite remember where is the Hôtel des Capucines. Is it in the street of that name? Then it's not far from the Madeleine, and also, you observe, right across the river from the Chamber—just a pleasant stroll for M. le Député. This was, I'll wager, a cheerful promotion for Mademoiselle de Sombreuil. No more money-changers, small négociants, defaulting bankers. Mistress of an homme de politique! What possible visions may she not have imagined? Perhaps it was to celebrate the Capucines interlude that she got the tight little jacquette à capuchon. But alas the dream was brief. M. Vergoin, the radical

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deputy from Seine-et-Oise, began to think seriously about his career. This little liaison might compromise him in the Chamber, where the position of a radical was unstable anyhow. Quite quietly he slipped out of Mademoiselle's sight.

By this time our heroine cannot be blamed for a certain disbelief in the intentions of the staglike sex. Issuing from her apartment at the Capucines, perhaps to walk across the Bridge of Concord and see if there were any sign of the laggard deputy, she notices herself persistently followed by two gentlemen. She calls a gendarme and protests; all three are taken to the station-house—*conducted to the violin* is the classic French phrase. There, after explanations, the horrid truth appears: the two pursuivants are plain clothes men, agents of the Minister of the Interior. Mademoiselle remains at the violin for ten days. Then she is made mount in a "cellular carriage" and is debarked en route for Circassia. She is forwarded to Marseilles, after eight lamentable tarryings in provincial prisons by the way.

### II

PERHAPS, in my enjoyment of M. Bataille's *Causes Criminelles et Mondaines*, I lay myself open to the old French mot "Avez-vous lu Baruch?" The story is that once Racine lent La Fontaine a Bible; La Fontaine fell upon the book of Baruch for the first time, was staggered by its power, and exclaimed "Quel était donc ce Baruch? c'était un bien beau génie!" And thereafter the cheerful fabulist went about asking his friends if they'd

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read Baruch. So the phrase became proverbial for anyone who discovers and ejaculates what is old familiar matter to the well informed. Perhaps all the young Macaulays know Bataille already, and I am only (in Baruch's own phrase) a scarecrow in a garden of cucumbers.

At any rate one has good company in one's admiration. In one of the annuals (1888) no less a person than Paul Bourget contributes a preface of homage to M. Bataille as a psychological reporter. M. Bourget says, and justly indeed, how valuable these case-reports are, not only to the philosopher and the moralizer, but to the novelist. "The crimes of an epoch," he says, "are a very important chapter in the history of the soul of that epoch." There is perhaps some typical literary man's exaggeration in that remark; for probably the crimes of all epochs are much the same in essence, and fall into very simple classification.

The particular little Parisian Nights' Entertainment that I selected for you from M. Bataille's wealth is, of course, a trifling one. And yet, slight as it is, what a novel one could make of it. Can't you imagine what an experienced opener of hearts, one who knew his *demi-monde*, could do with Mlle de Sombreuil? She is pure—I mean sheer—*de Maupassant*. One has to remind oneself continually that she is not just a character in fiction but a real person—might even be living to this day, though I admit it unlikely.

We left her on her way to Marseilles in a "*voiture cellulaire*," whatever that may be. Would they have sent her all the way by road, in a Black Maria? Yet the

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journey can hardly have been done by train, if it took eight days. Arrived at Marseilles she had to wait a week for a ship to Constantinople. Apparently she now had some freedom of circulation, for she went to a hotel. Evidently the hardships of the cellular vehicle had not impaired her capacity to charm. For staying in that hotel whom should she find, and subjugate, but another congressman—M. Guillot, deputy from the Isère. He, like a true Southerner, was not backward in chivalrous sympathy. I imagine them sitting in some brasserie of that lively town, and Mademoiselle telling her troubles. Give us a little tzigane music, chef d'orchestre, and the lively traffic of the Cannebière (Plût à Dieu that I see that street some day!) and I can imagine M. Guillot rising to the occasion. Of course, he says, the decree of elongation is all a mistake; there's some misunderstanding somewhere; besides, that old law of 1847 about expulsions applies only to political offenders. Certainly not, Mademoiselle, to anyone as charming as yourself . . . whose only errors, if I may say so, Mademoiselle, have been those generous ones you were divinely created to collaborate. . . . I can hear the deputy from the Isère saying these things, I see him twirl his moustache.

So Mademoiselle feels that she has found a friend again. And then, delightful coincidence, when she asks him about his colleague, the vanished M. Vergoin, it appears that gentleman is at this very moment conducting a case at law in Aix—only a few kilometres away. There is surely some misunderstanding that can be cleared up. Like a gallant man, M. Guillot himself escorts her to

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Aix. Evidently the Chamber is on vacation, and the deputies are off mending their fences. They find M. Vergoin in the court room, they sit listening to his speech. Does it startle M. Vergoin when he sees, so unexpectedly, the swan plume hat in the audience? He had supposed his mistress well on her way to Circassia. We don't really know enough about M. Vergoin to hazard any opinions. Anyhow, according to Maître Demange (Mademoiselle's attorney, you remember) the lady returned to Marseilles escorted now by both deputies.

It is a gay little nicety of human conduct: perhaps finding his colleague so enthusiastic reanimated the embers of M. Vergoin? The situation was now almost that of a Cluny farce: our heroine so closely attended by her two congressmen that neither would let the other out of his sight. A verbal process of their conversations would be a priceless document surely. As in the song of the men of Marseilles, the day of glory was arrived. Mademoiselle, squired by two members of Parliament, must have thought herself secure. But another pair of followers was also on the job. For the next evening, while the trio were dining merrily in a modish restaurant (I wish its name were given, I should love to hunt it out) enter two "agents." I see poor Mademoiselle turn pale as they approach the table. I see MM. Vergoin and Guillot halted with the wine cup half raised. At the moment, Mademoiselle's legal residence is Marseilles (pending her elongation to Circassia) and the trip to Aix was a contravention. She is under arrest.

Whatever may have been the jealousies of the two

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deputies, they are united against the common foe. They protest furiously, but the policemen are firm. M. Guillot particularly is outraged. If the lady is taken off to jail at this time of night, he says he will go too. He will protect her against indignity. He will have a cot put for himself in her cell. M. Vergoin, for his part, though it is two hours of the morning, gets the prefect of police out of bed and they telegraph to Paris. At last—after some dreary waiting, I expect—the reply comes from the Minister of the Interior. He authorizes the liberation of the prisoner on condition that M. Vergoin, on returning to Paris, will call on him and make a personal explanation of the affair.

Here the gallant M. Guillot disappears from the record. He goes back to his constituents in the Isère, I suppose. M. Vergoin resumes his burden like a white man. He returns to Paris—with Mlle de Sombreuil; and on the morrow of their return, as M. Demange so charmingly puts it, the deputy and the young woman saw the sun rise together.

But for the last time. Was it the interview with the Minister of the Interior that frightened the deputy? Anyhow, again M. Vergoin disappeared from the presumably eastern-facing Hôtel des Capucines. Mademoiselle, very unquiet in mind, was rash enough to set forth to look for him. Two agents grabbed her and hustled her off to the station. This time they would take no risk of her waiting for a ship at Marseilles. They handed her a ticket for Constantinople, and kept her under scrutiny until the train pulled out.

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It's a long journey. I've even taken the trouble to look it up in my Livret-Chaix. Supposing that the trains in 1886 ran on much the same schedule as now, and supposing they put her on the Simplon Orient express, she would leave the Gare de Lyons at 20:35 and get to Stamboul at 17:15 on the fourth day. The first stop the train would make is at Laroche-Migennes, at 10:43 P.M. Those tall poplar trees along the canal (it runs right by the station platform) would be rustling in the cool evening air; and I hope indeed that she had enough money in her purse to go to the buffet for a sandwich and one of those bottles of Sauterne with the cork already loosened. But what a journey for a hat with swan's plumes.

Yet if you think that Mademoiselle's boulevarding spirit was broken, how little you know her. She was merely recoiling for a strong saltation. It appears that she stayed in Constantinople only briefly—long enough to get the swan's plumes cleaned and to revisit old sentimental haunts along the Black Sea waterfront where the careless nursemaid went pramming. She had thoroughly grasped the theory of her decree of expulsion, and so, as soon as she had found a reliable gentleman who was going to Paris, she returned there with him. The identity of this client we do not know, but he also, like the earlier *négociant*, had *bainsdemerist* tastes. They had a little holiday, in the warm days of August, at Ostend. (I should have loved to see Mademoiselle in a bathing costume of the 1886 mode.) But then, coming back to town, she not unnaturally went to the Hôtel des Capucines to get her

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luggage, which she had to leave behind when she was hurried off to the Golden Horn. There they refused to surrender her things until the bill was paid. The baggage had remained in the room—the room of the sunrise—all this time, two months. And the room, said the management, must be paid for.

Mademoiselle believed, says her attorney, that according to the custom of "gens du monde," M. Vergoin ought to pay. She wrote to him; he refused. Mademoiselle sent the lady of the hotel, Mme Noël, to treat with him. M. Vergoin replied that he had already spent twelve or fifteen hundred francs on her, he was through. "Que voulez-vous messieurs?" adds the amusing M. Demange. "Avant d'être député, M. Vergoin a été magistrat en province—et dans le milieu austère où il a vécu, on ne se rend pas bien compte de l'étendue des sacrifices qu'il faut faire sur l'autel des divinités parisiennes." But now we can't help sympathizing with Mademoiselle's suspicion that M. Vergoin was acting double in some of these manoeuvres, for again, as soon as she tried to get in touch with him the two famous agents reappear. She is arrested once more, and it is in these circumstances that we find her in court—"insolently powdered."

I don't feel that M. Vergoin comes out of it very well. There is a long letter from him, read into the testimony, in which he insists that all the public scandal of the affair has been worked up to discredit him politically. I am not concerned to analyze the problem too

## Mlle De Sombreuil

minutely; but I do feel that at least he should have paid the rent for the sunrise.

But the latest *ami*, the bainsdemerist of Ostend, was still loyal, and so Maître Demange's final plea for his client seems to me reasonable enough. "Leave her in Paris, then," he says, "since she is not a dangerous woman, since she has not threatened Monsieur the deputy as was alleged. Leave her in this Paris she loves, since she is in the company of a friend, and you have made a habit of not bothering her when she has a protector. Be indulgent to her, gentlemen, for surely she has never been able to take seriously a decree of expulsion so capriciously exercised. And you, Parisians, you also can be reassured henceforward, for you will have the services of the two policemen who followed her about incessantly, and who can now go back to their jobs." This final merri-ment of M. Demange "*soulève dans l'auditoire une explosion de rires inextinguibles.*"

The court, after a brief deliberation, sentenced Mademoiselle to a month in prison. M. Bataille adds that at the end of her imprisonment the decree of expulsion was again put into effect. This means, I suppose, that the protective impulse of the sea bather did not survive a thirty-day anesthesia. She is living in Brussels at the moment, says Bataille—"but she has vowed to return to Paris, and she is a woman to keep her word."

Poor Mademoiselle! She may have been a tough and tiresome person; it is true that she seems to have had an incapacity to retain her admirers. It was with her, very likely, as with Mr. Don Marquis's mehitabel, being ab-

## Off the Deep End

ducted so many times had spoiled her for a wife. But somehow, between the lines of the testimony, I seem to feel something that deserves respect. She never spoke for herself at the trial: when questioned by the judge she confided the whole matter to the eloquence of her lawyer. Perhaps, brooding the various griefs and escapades of her career, she felt incapable of doing justice to her inward light. As she looked round the court-room, on that dark November day, did she feel the Paris she loved slipping tragically away from her? Did she see a panorama of receding paramours—the aristocratic M. de Sombreuil, the defaulting banker, the worthy négociant, the congressmen, the bainsdemerist? I'm not a bit surprised that she threw the bread in the matron's face.

Brussels, of course, is as good a substitute as she could find. But you have guessed by now what she felt about Paris. Did she get back there? I hope and believe she did.

TOUCH WOOD



## TOUCH WOOD

### I

NEWS of his death sent one outdoors, so clear, so hale, so mild a day in brown January. Regret not me, he once said; lover of cider and women and the country dance, noticer of all the things of earth, how often he had made suggestion in his poems of ways we might greet his memory when he was gone.

It could not be done indoors; and thankfully it did not have to be done in the city, in an office, among palaver and the goodly merriments of one's fellows. It was strange to think that even thousands of miles from where he lay silent, telephones must ring and editors make their arrangements because he had "doffed his wrinkled gear." But here was bright silence, a morning spring-like, savoury earth in thaw, the clean tracery of bare trees on blue. And by some deep instinct every thought was of plain and elemental things. One wanted to smell earth, to touch wood, to taste cold water, to light fires. One thought of bread and salt and apples; of the gestures of country toil, of the marshy pond and the crowing of cocks. One thought of his poems, simple and nourishing as a bowl of bread and milk to tastes long overfed with rich delicates.

## Off the Deep End

A morning for simple things, not a morning for (you remember the Preface to his *Late Lyrics*, in 1922) "the knowingness affected by junior reviewers." On so halcyon a sky, in such clear memory of all things dear, one could see the proud and puzzled heads that one had loved, profiled against darkness. Even the dark would perhaps be tender to such heads. And he, who made the hearts of men and women his brooding study, and who knew that no lesser study is worthy of man's full power, would have welcomed the magic of that western air. Instinct, enriched by thought of him, made one quick to see and hear things close at hand. The laughter of three small girls, singing as they were taken to school; the easy loafing attitude of men strewing cinders on the road: the slack working gesture of the negro and the Mediterranean, but perhaps not so different from his own Wessex labourers. In the thick dead leaves the old dog lay curled, raising his hairy jowls of Socrates to scan a neighbour's quick hens picking a trespass on his land, but too indolent with age and sunshine to protest. He growled a little inwardly, and pretended that with such shaggy brows he did not see them. In the village post office the garage man, usually so active, was sitting for a little philosophy. "There's not ten men in a hundred," I overheard him say, "who could tell you they never take a drink. Well, life's what you make it."

One wanted to think about things that were very real and humble. He was going back to earth, and earth everywhere was richer for it. One thought of clean things and sharp things; of troubled ironies and shy pangs. One

## Touch Wood

wanted, I say, to touch wood; to hear the crescendo secant of a saw-blade going through logs, to feel and smell the fresh section. One raked and rummaged, aimlessly perhaps, but alert to notice the shapes of pebbles, the feel of stick and stone, the colour and smell of bonfire smoke. One could not have easily explained to any visitor that in burning a pile of trash in the back lot one was trying to pay honour to Thomas Hardy; but so it was.

There was a soft clear night when a charm was laid on winter, wind, and water; when a group of people met by fire and moonlight to play picnic. "Pan, that old Arcadian Knight," random echo from some old song, was their toast, and there was much halloo. Flame was fierce and golden in the hearth and all the watersides glazed with Tennysonian lustre; every prospect pleased and perhaps only John Barleycorn was vile. Yet the occasion was not quite what these jolly truants had dreamed. It was a picnic, not quite a transmigration. Perhaps it should have been conducted without benefit of orgy. Perhaps, to be most perfectly memorable, things must not be too eagerly anticipated. And the odd thing was, so one of these revellers told me, that the most lovely episode in that night of dim silver, was passing the morning milk-wagon as they drove gaily to catch Port Washington's famous 3:46 A.M. train. There, one of Borden's crepuscule galaxy, was the ambling vehicle, with lantern swinging from the axle and Lizzie Borden, the patient piebald, drawing her exuberant freight. Alas that some of these gallants were themselves too piebald to observe the pretty scene, as the milk-wagon emerged in the glare

## Off the Deep End

of their speeding lamps. But so, under our merriest anæsthetics, continues the sober tread of humble service and poor human need.

This, I think, Hardy never forgot. He ran the scale of all observations, from the starry nebula to the country girl's garters, but even in writing of Shelley's skylark he remembered the actual pinch of fragile dust that it now may be. I think he never forgot of what sweet craving earth we are put together. Death puts even the greatest at the mercy of random pens. There will be many a yard of print, long prepared in newspaper morgues, about his "pessimism," regardless of his own definite disclaimer. It was not "pessimism" (only a label, anyhow) he said, but simply "questioning." We will be reminded of his

Sit on Sundays in my chair  
And read that moderate man Voltaire

as evidence of irreligion; yet it was he who so strongly appealed, in almost his last public word, for "an alliance between religion, which must be retained unless the world is to perish, and complete rationality—which must come" (he added) "by means of the interfusing effect of poetry." Those who saw him most often toward the end describe for us the beautiful serenity of his old age, which was certainly not that of a pessimist. But the word means nothing anyhow—

Let me enjoy the earth no less  
Because the all-enacting Might  
That fashioned forth its loveliness  
Had other aims than my delight.

## Touch Wood

I have never chanced to find anything of Hardy's in an anthology of humorous verse, and yet there are some of his pieces ("The Ruined Maid," for instance) which will explode any gathering in laughter. Eddie Guest, to my way of thinking, is a far gloomier bard. Occasionally even, by an odd transfusion of J. Gordon Coogler, the laughter was, I fear, unpremeditated. I have never been able to be quite solemn about "The Newcomer's Wife." Outside a pub the Newcomer hears some unpleasant truths about his bride of the preceding week—

That night there was the splash of a fall  
Over the slimy harbour-wall:  
They searched, and at the deepest place  
Found him with crabs upon his face.

Someone is sure to reiterate the old legend that it was pique or deep indignation at fool criticisms that turned Hardy from the novel to poetry. That seems to me inconceivable. A man of his vitality and toughness writes as and how he pleases; and the sequence of a man's work obeys laws deeper than publicity. He turned to poetry, one may guess, because he could better express in that measure what he wanted to say. He had things to say that could hardly be uttered in prose: so has every human being. Well might most men—even a Shakespeare or a Milton—having finished *The Dynasts* at the age of sixty-seven—rest on their blotters. But see how, past seventy, he began life anew, and wrote still a whole bookfull of exquisite song. Even if we of this age had nothing else to be proud of could we not say, We were alive, actual

## Off the Deep End

denizens of this planet, when *The Dynasts* was written.

The history of the future would be written, he said in one of his most gnomic verses,

Not as the loud had spoken  
But as the mute had thought.

He spoke for the mute—and one might remember that a Semichorus of Years or Pities is just as mute as a Wessex milkmaid. He spoke for the mute, and for all that is most dumb, most craving, most troubled in ourselves. His consolation (you remember his poem "The Subalterns") was that of the British viceroy in Ireland in the old days, who received a letter: "My Lord, this is to inform you that we shall kill you to-morrow, but nothing personal is intended." So, he tells us, life "looks less fell" when we realize that Storm, Sickness and Death are also slaves, and move under sealed orders: their attentions to us mean nothing personal. In a haphazard so vast all eventually acquiesce. But when we see—as oh with what imperilled clearness we do see—faces we love outlined against the dark, see the double question of their eyes, then we can sometimes turn, for pain and beauty, to his stoic lovingkindness. Love, jealousy, anger, greed, cruelty, glamour—all these are the commonplaces of literature; we have been familiar with them in books for so many years. Yet how startled, how indignant, how amazed—even how grateful—we all are when they happen to ourselves.

Once I had a letter from a railway mail-clerk in

## Touch Wood

Nebraska, in which he told me that Hardy was his favourite writer. Crossing those wide prairies in a mail car would be a perfect place to think about him. To think about him needs a sense of space, of quiet, of earth's edge against the wind. One must be able to think of laughter and folly, of country festival, of lips and hands and hair. One must be able to touch wood, light fire, taste wine and bread and salt, things elemental and sacramental. So I have cut logs and brought them in, and I shall burn them to-night in homage of Thomas Hardy.

### II

HE HAD to be dead before they could make him mix much with merely literary society. It is queer to think that Westminster Abbey was perhaps his first real London club. When they buried his ashes there, they sprinkled Wessex earth into the grave. But his heart is in the country churchyard. Reading of that rather ghastly double sepulture, one turns again to the strange poem "His Heart," in *Moments of Vision*—

It was inscribed like a terrestrial sphere  
With quaint vermiculations close and clear—  
Yes, there at last, eyes opened, did I see  
His whole sincere symmetric history;  
There were his truth, his simple singlemindedness,  
Strained, maybe, by time's storms, but there no less.

There, you see, he has said it all himself.

A bookseller told me the other day that since Hardy's

## Off the Deep End

death there had been a great call for his books; but only for two titles—*Tess*, and *Jude*; “the only two,” he added, with the amiable indignation that every bookseller has toward sheeplike customers, “that they’ve heard of. I wish to gosh someone would come in and buy his Poems.”

To sit down quietly, very quietly, to Hardy’s Collected Poems is a strange experience. Perhaps you will try it some evening. Take first a long swallow of open air, and have something burning beside you, even if only a candle; fire is element and symbol of sheer life. Then set away every irrelevant mirth or perplexity: be for an hour or so as passively aware as a sprawling dog. Refresh yourself with his sense of earthly reality.

For Hardy’s poems, full of “quaint vermiculations,” are as close to life as this evening’s newspaper. Indeed they are often quite tabloid in their emphasis on the morbid, the comic, the melodramatic. Once, in irreverent college days, I planned to write a little essay to be called *A Census of Bastards in the Works of Thomas Hardy*. It would have been very numerous. For in his heyday he dealt, in a way that merely genteel people can never understand, with cruel actualities of life.

But in his poems, even more than in his novels, you see the deep naïveté that was so firm a part of his strength. A smaller man would have hesitated to publish many of these doggerels (as he himself called some of them). But he saved them all carefully, and even in his latest years was still printing many of his juvenilia. For he felt, with good instinct, that they were part of his rich testimony to the grim human comedy. “Time’s laugh-

## Touch Wood

ingstocks" was one of his favourite phrases: but who ever made merrier at Time's expense? To be publishing, at eighty-five, verses one wrote at twenty-five, is that not a brisk tweak for the phantom with the scythe?

Suppose you had never read any Hardy, had only vaguely heard of him as a dark brooder on chance and fate, a "pessimist." Wouldn't you then be surprised to find that he is also one of the most graceful and versatile of light rhymers, with a Dobsonian charm in airy measures, a master of what has been called *vers de société*? But so it is. Indeed much of his best verse is exactly that, *vers de société*, though it happens to be rustic society. There is an extraordinary loveliness in the plain candour of his singing, its monosyllabic words, its sweet frolicsome joy in all earth's revel. The great love and honour that men held for Hardy were due not only to the perfect dignity of his "whole symmetric history," but also I think to a queer feeling that all his readers share: here was not some mysterious incomprehensible genius, not (as he described Shakespeare) some strange bright foreign bird seen momentarily among the barnyard fowls; he was homogeneous to ourselves. Nothing is pleasanter than to take a few friends who have been mistaught that Hardy was always the brooder on the wrongs of Time, and read aloud to them some of his exquisite songs of love. Try for instance "Great Things," or "Timing Her."

Of the clarity of his quick observation you will find innumerable evidence: the girl's thumb against the spring of her parasol, swallows flying "like little crossbows," the sparrow "in his wheel-rut bath," "the sleepy fly

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that rubs its hands." He had that passionate tenderness of eye that belongs mostly to grave and troubled men. And as much as any poet who ever lived he was singer and student of women. What an eye he had for them! Somewhere in his poems you will find a little verse about one who sees a girl on a railway platform as the train pulls out, and forever reproaches himself for not having obeyed his impulse to get out and speak to her. (He wrote a number of poems about railway trains, which were probably always a pleasurable adventure to him, as he travelled little. One of his friends tells us that he never talked over a telephone until he was over eighty.) Women, who are such reckless realists in secret, will always applaud his enthusiasm for essentials.

Now he who relished the grimly comic would not want us to be too dolorous in speaking of his poems. Time will make large deduction among them. But you will lose much pleasure if you only read him in selections. Evidently he was not critical of his own verse, and wanted us to have all his fierce and loving directory of common life. I should be sorry if you let any anthologist take away from you some of the queerer phases of his genius—the lady dancing in her nightgown because she has just heard that her husband is dead; the bride in satin slippers being driven to the madhouse; the little girl wondering why her mother dresses the dolls like soldiers; the husband dying of a cough who sees his wife already buying the fashionable mourning. (Hardy has no great tenderness for husbands, and either cornutates or kills them off as promptly as possible.) He was the satirist of Circum-

## Touch Wood

stance, but he liked to fabricate his circumstances pretty carefully and made a point of tilting his scale with a few fragments of broken Commandment. The poem about the Statue of Liberty (but not our one) is as amusing an example of this as you'll find. Or the village women quarrelling as to who shall decorate the grave where their numerous children have been buried "like sprats in a tin." But as a matter of fact the bodies have been moved, and beneath the mound is nothing but a drain-pipe. Sometimes one remembers that Hardy began as an architect, for sometimes his coincidences have been almost too methodically worked out to specification in blue print.

But it will be hard to have again, in this intricate time, another poet so calmly and beautifully remote from our world of skirmish and negotiation. Every thinking soul must, for its own necessity, defend some line of retreat into stars and simplicity. No man of our time kept open so nobly his communications with Silence. So I advise you only, before you sit down to read his poems, to grace yourself with quiet, with a smell of clean earth and sky, with a humble love of other human beings. This man explored the whole range of human anxiety: he began by writing "On the Use of Terra Cotta in Domestic Architecture" and went from there as high as the tremendous choruses of Years and Pities that end *The Dynasts*. His conclusion, he himself suggested once, was that even if man's consciousness was a mistake on God's part, at least it was a mistake we can bear, considering the unearned joys it brings us.

So a plain little gray man, very courteous, very

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wrinkled, with eyes as bright and riddling as an owl's, has joined a great company. It was almost the first time he had consorted seriously with fashionable people, but they welcomed him, and were worthy of him.

T H E   A R R O W

TO  
R. M. S. *CARONIA*

## T H E   A R R O W



### I

I SUPPOSE the reason why cabin stewards fold them like that, instead of tucking 'em in as bed-clothes are arranged on shore, is that if the ship founders you can get out of your bunk so much quicker. The life preservers are up there, on top of the little wardrobe. The picture of Mr. Boddy-Finch, the resolute-looking man with a moustache, showing how to wear the life waistcoat, is on the panel by the door. Mr. Boddy-Finch's moustache has a glossy twist, probably waxed like that to keep it from getting wet while he's demonstrating his waistcoat. He guarantees that the thing will keep you afloat for forty-eight hours: how can he tell unless

he's tried it? Amusing scene, Mr. Boddy-Finch floating competently in the Mersey while a jury of shipowners on the dock cheer him on toward the forty-eighth hour.

So he was thinking as he got into the berth and carefully snuggled himself into the clothes that were folded, not tucked. The detective story slid down beside the pillow. No bed companion is so soothing as a book you don't intend to read. He had realized just now that the strangeness had worn off. This was his first voyage. He had supposed, of course, he would be ill, but he had never felt more at home, physically, in his life. The distemper that had burdened him was of another sort; but now it was gone—gone so quietly and completely that he hardly missed it yet. He only knew that some secretive instinct had brought him early to his bunk, not to sleep, but because there, in that narrow solitude, he could examine the queer delicious mood now pervading him.

The steady drum and quiver of a slow ship finding her own comfortable way through heavy

## THE ARROW

sea. The little stateroom, which he had to himself, was well down and amidships; the great double crash and rhythm of the engines was already part of his life. A pounding hum, pounding hum, pounding hum. He invented imitative phrases to accompany that cadence. Oh, lyric love, half piston and half crank! Roofed over by the upper berth, shaded from the lamp by the clicking chintz curtain, this was his lair to spy out on the laws of life. He could see his small snug dwelling sink and sway. Marvellous cradling ease, sweet equation of all forces. He studied the pattern of honest bolts in the white iron ceiling. Surely, with reference to himself, they were rigid: yet he saw them rise and dip and swing. The corridor outside was one long creak. There was a dropping sag of his berth as it caved beneath him, then a climbing push as it rose, pressing under his shoulders. He waited, in curious lightness and thrill, to feel the long slow lift, the hanging pause, the beautiful sinking plunge. The downward slope then gently tilted sideways. His

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knees pressed hard against the board, he could see his toothbrush glide across the tumbler. He was incredibly happy in an easy bliss. This primitive cycle of movement seemed a part of the secret rhymes of biology. Now he understood why sailors often feel ill when they reach the dull, flat solidity of earth.

The lull and ecstasy of the sea is what man was meant for. The whole swinging universe takes you up in its arms, and you know both desire and fulfilment. And down below, from far within, like—oh, like things you believed you'd forgotten—that steady, grumbling hum. The first night he was a bit anxious when she rolled: his entrails yawned when she leaned over so heavily on emptiness. But then he had divined something; it is the things that frighten you that are really worth while. Now, when she canted, he did not hold back; he leaned with her, as though eager to come as close as possible to that seethe and hiss along her dripping side. It was the inexpressive faces of stewards and stewardesses that had best fortified him. They

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stood on duty along the exclaiming passages, priests of this white ritual world. Their sallow sexton faces seemed gravely reassuring the congregation that all was calculated, charted, and planned. They flexed and balanced serenely like vicars turning eastward at the appointed clause. He had barely escaped horrifying one of them, his bedroom steward who came in suddenly—the door was open—while he was doing a private caper of triumph at realizing he wasn't ill. He repeated his silly chant, smiling in the berth:

“Wallow in a hollow with a pounding hum,  
Pillow on a billow with a pounding hum.  
Now the Atlantic  
Drives me frantic,  
Pounding pounding pounding hum!”

If you ever tell anyone this story, he said to me—long afterward, when he first talked about it—make it very matter-of-fact. I know that some writers have a way of putting things

## THE ARROW

handsomely, picturesquely, full of ingenious, witty phrases. That's dangerous, because people get a notion that these affairs are only the invention of literary folks.

The first days were very uneasy. He couldn't read, he couldn't bear talking the gay chaff that is legal tender on shipboard, he dreaded the discovery of a mutual friend in Pelham Manor that thrills adjoining deck chairs. He couldn't write, nor imagine concentrating his mind on cards; besides, he was young enough to be alarmed by the warning notice about Professional Gamblers. He'd have enjoyed more deck tennis, but the courts were usually occupied by young engineer-officers and a group of girls whose parents, in desperation, were sending them abroad to school. They were rather noisily true to type and carried with them everywhere a toy phonograph, the size of a candy box. This occult machine, busily rotating dark spirals of jazz, was heard intermittently like a pagan refrain. It uttered such cries as Pan might ejaculate under ether. Long after

the diligent ship's orchestra had couched themselves it chattered, in dark corners of the deck, against the thunder of yeasty sea. Evidently it was hastening its damsels into a concentric *cul de sac* where they would eventually find themselves blocked. There would, perhaps, be the momentary alleviation of a picture in the Sunday paper ("Among the season's interesting brides") after which they would be irretrievable wives and mothers—with friends in Pelham Manor.

He paced the deck endlessly in windy bright September. Weariness is the only drug for that sea unease. At night the mastheads swung solemnly against clear grainy sky. Even the Dipper seemed swinging. Here and there he paused, in a kind of dream, vacantly studying the log of the day's run, pondering on the chart a shoal called the Virgins, or watching, through a brass-rimmed port, cheerful people gossiping in the lounge. He was too shy and too excited to enter into the innocent pastimes of the voyage. Sometimes he went into the smokeroom for a

drink. Brought up in the Prohibition era, acquainted only with raw gin and fusel oils, leperous distillments, he had never before encountered honest ripened Scotch. When that hale benevolent spirit amazed him with its pure warmth, it occurred to him that perhaps there is no reason why the glamour of life should not be taken neat. It need not always be smuggled about in medicine bottles or under false and counterfeit labels. But the smokeroom frightened some essential chastity in his mind. It was full of women smoking and drinking. They wore cheese-coloured silk stockings, provokingly obvious, and their eyes were sportively bright. Perhaps they were gamblers even more professional than those referred to in the sign. One evening, when he had a bad cold, the doctor gave him some phenacetin and aspirin tablets to take with hot toddy. That night he lay stewing in his warm cradle, submerged in a heavy ocean of sleep, rolled in a nothingness so perfect it was almost prenatal. So he told the doctor the next morning, and caught a flash from

that officer's eyes. Both put the phrase aside where it wouldn't get broken, for private meditation. Being diffident, he did not tell the doctor what jolly dreams had swum through the deep green caverns of his swoon. His mind lay on the bottom like a foundered galleon, its treasures corroding in the strong room, while white mermaids . . . No, they weren't mermaids, he said to himself.

But now I know why the steamship companies arrange so many distractions for their passengers.

As nearly as I can make out, his obscure agitations resolved themselves into a certainty that something was going to happen. But he could put no label on this strange apprehensive sentiment. When you can put your feelings into words, they cease to be dangerous. Now you see, he added, why my bunk was the safest place.

He paused. I think he realized that I didn't see, altogether; and I nearly remarked, in the

jocular way an old friend can say things, that if he expected any editor to be interested in this story it was time he got into it something more tangible than phenacetin mermaids. The ladies with cheese-coloured stockings had sounded promising. But somehow, with no notion at all of what he was coming to, I wanted him to work it out in his own way. After all, it's only the very cheap kind of stories that have to be told in a hurry.

Evidently it would be wrong to imagine that his disturbance was unhappy. For I get the impression that, little by little, a secret elation possessed him: on that special evening when he retired early to his berth, he was particularly certain that some blissful meaning lay inside this experience. For suddenly, at the heart of that unsteady clamour, he lay infinitely at peace. The dull crash of those huge pistons was an unerring music; the grave plunging of the ship was perfect rest. He lay trembling with happiness, in what he described (rather oddly) as a kind of piety; a physical piety.

## THE ARROW

I wanted him to make this a little plainer, but he was rather vague. "I felt, more truly than ever before, a loyalty to the physical principles of the universe. I felt like Walt Whitman."

I decided not to pursue this further, but in a determined effort to explain himself he made another odd remark, which I suppose ought to be put in the record. "One day the chief engineer took me down to see the machinery. But before we went below he made me leave my watch in his cabin. He said that if I had it on me when we went by the dynamos their magnetic power was so strong that it would throw my watch into a kind of trance. It would be interesting as a specimen of polarization, he said, but it wouldn't be a timepiece. Well, it was like that with me. There are some instincts that it's better to leave behind when you go in a ship. I felt polarized."

It appears that he felt himself on the verge of great mental illuminations; but, as one turns away from a too brilliant light, he averted him-

self from the effort of thinking. He took up the detective story, but it lacked its usual soporific virtue. And presently, still wakeful, he slipped on his dressing gown and went for a hot bath. The bathroom, farther down the corridor, would be unoccupied at this hour. On that deck all ports were screwed up, on account of the heavy weather, and it was undeniably stuffy. Several stateroom doors were hooked ajar, for ventilation, and as he passed along. . . .

"I should have told you" (he interrupted himself) "about the day we sailed from New York, a marvellous warm autumn noon, the buoys chiming like lunch bells as we slipped down toward Staten Island. I got down to the ship rather early. After seeing my baggage safely in the stateroom and looking at some parcels that had been sent me—you know that little diary, *My Trip Abroad*, that someone always gives you; I'm sorry to have to say its pages are still blank—I sat in the writing room scribbling some postcards. You must realize

## THE ARROW

what an extraordinary adventure all this was for me. My Trip Abroad! With a sense of doing something rather dangerous, I went off the pier to mail my cards. I remember the drowsy Saturday sunlight of that wide cobbly space; taxis driving up; the old Fourteenth Street trolleys rumbling along as usual, and in a few hours I should be far away from it all. It was then, returning across the street, that I noticed the head of some goddess or other carved over the piers. I wondered why, but I didn't dally to speculate. I had a naïve fear that the ship might somehow slide off without me—though there was still nearly an hour to sailing time.

“A friend had come down to see me off, and we palavered about this and that: he was an old traveller and was probably amused at my excitement. The deck was thronged with people saying good-bye, and while my friend and I were having our final words, there was a bunch of women near us. My companion may have observed that I was hardly paying attention to our talk. I was noticing a gray dress that had

its back turned toward me. It was an exquisitely attractive thing, a sort of cool silky stuff with crisp little pleats. Its plain simplicity made it admirably piquant. Somehow I had a feeling that anyone who would wear so delicious a costume must be interesting. I can't attempt to describe the garment in technical terms, but it was draped just properly flat behind the shoulders and tactfully snug over the hips. What caught my eye specially was a charming frill that went down the middle, accompanied by a file of buttons and ending in a lively little black bow. I only saw the back of this outfit, which included a bell-shaped gray hat and a dark shingled nape. I noted that its wearer was tall and athletic in carriage, but my friend then recaptured my attention. When he had gone the dress had vanished. A visitor, I supposed; it was obviously the summery kind of thing that would be worn, on a warm day, to go down to say good-bye to someone who was leaving. But several times, in my various considerings, I had remembered it. I thought particularly of

what I called the Spinal Frill and the impudent little twirl of ribbon that ended it. Did or did not anyone who wore that know how enchantingly inciting it was? It must be put there with some intention. But was it the wearer's intention, or only some casual fancy of the dress-maker's? Yet it was there to be admired; and if I had gone to the lady and told her how much I admired it, wouldn't I only have been doing my duty?

"Well, as I started to say, when I went by that partly open door I saw that gray dress hanging in a stateroom. It was on a hanger, its back toward me. It looked rather limp and dejected, but there could be no doubt about the frill and the buttons and the bow.

"I was hurrying, as you do hurry when you go along a public passage in your dressing gown, and it really didn't occur to me until I was comfortably soaking in a deep tub of slanting hot water that I might have noted the number of the room. Then I could probably have found out from the passenger list who she was. But

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even so, I was glad I hadn't. I didn't want to seem to spy on the gray dress: I admired it too much for that; and also, just in the instant I saw it, it looked so emaciated, so helpless, almost as if it were seasick. I couldn't have taken advantage of it. I dallied in my bath for some time; when I returned, all the doors were shut."

THE following day there was that subtle change that comes over every Atlantic voyage about three quarters of the way across. Perhaps it happens at the place where the waves are parted, like hair. For on one side you see them rolling in toward America; on the other they move with equal regularity toward England and France. So obviously there must be a place where they turn back to back. The feeling of Europe being near increased the humility of passengers making their maiden voyage; more than ever they shrank from the masterful condescension of those anxious to explain what an intolerable thrill the first sight of Land's End would be. A certain number of English ladies, who had lain mummified and plaided in their chairs, now began to pace the deck like Britannia's daughters. Even one or two French,

hitherto almost buried under the general mass of Anglo-Saxon assertiveness, pricked up and showed a meagre brightness. The young women with the phonograph, if they had been listening, might now have learned how to pronounce Cherbourg. Friendships that had been still a trifle green and hard suddenly ripened and even fell squashily overripe. Champagne popped in the dining saloon; the directors of Messrs. Bass prepared to declare another dividend; there was a fancy-dress ball. A homeward-bound English lecturer hoped that the weather would be clear going up the Chops of the Channel; for then, he said, in the afternoon light you will see the rocks of Cornwall shining like opals. But the weather grew darker and wetter; and with every increase of moisture and gale the British passengers grew ruddier and more keen. Even the breakfast kippers seemed stronger, more pungent, as they approached their native waters; the grapefruit correspondingly pulpier and less fluent. It was borne in upon the Americans that they were now a long

way from home. Hardheaded business men, whose transactions with the smokeroom steward now proved to have had some uses, were showing their wives how to distinguish the half-crown from the florin. It struck them oddly that it might be some time before they would see again the *Detroit Free Press* or the *Boston Transcript*. Thus, in varying manners, came the intuition (which always reaches the American with a peculiar shock) that they were approaching a different world—a world in which they were only too likely to be regarded as spoiled and plunderable children. The young women with the phonograph, subconsciously resenting this, kept the records going prodigiously.

In a mildly expectant way he had kept an eye open for a possible reappearance of the gray frock; but ratiocination persuaded him it was unlikely. For it was not the kind of dress one would wear for dancing—obviously, it was not an evening gown, for it had no hospitable exposures; yet it certainly had looked too flimsy for outdoor appearance in this weather.

Perhaps it was a garment too tenuous ever to be worn at all in Britain, he pondered, as the chill increased. Then came the fancy-dress ball, for which he was enlivened by the Scotch and the enthusiasm of his steward, who admired his tentatively suggested costume of bath towels and curtains. A stewardess pinned him together, loudly praising his originality, although she had seen one just like it almost every voyage for twenty years. He found himself dancing with a charming creature who might even, by her build and colour, have been the gray unknown. He had intended to be a trifle lofty with her, for he doubted whether she was his intellectual equal; but neither the cocktails nor the movement of the ship were conducive to Platonic demeanour. He decided to try her with a hypothetical question.

"If you had a gray dress with long sleeves and a nice little white collar, on what sort of occasion would you wear it?" he asked.

"When I became a grandmother," she replied promptly.

"There was nothing grandmotherly about it," he insisted. "It had a spinal frill and a velvet bow on the bottom."

She laughed so, they had to stop twirling.

"The bottom of what? The skirt?"

"No, at the end of the frill. On the saddle, so to speak—the haunches."

"Haunches!" she cried. "If you were any good as a dancer you'd know they don't have haunches nowadays. D'you see any haunches on me? I'm sorry I didn't get to know you sooner, you're priceless. This music is spinal frill enough for me. Come on, Rudolph, step on it."

So they danced. The second-cabin saloon, tables and chairs removed (she was a one-class ship in her last years), was now called the Italian Garden, a humorous attempt on the part of the steamship architects to persuade passengers they were not at sea. It was used for dancing and Divine Service, two activities so diverse that they cancelled out perfectly. The slippery floor swung gravely; every now and then there was a yell and a merry shuffling as a

deeper roll tilted the crowd out of step and they slid against stanchions and the potted shrubs that symbolized Italy. The musicians, remembering that to-morrow would be the day to take up their collection, braced themselves on their chairs and played valiantly. Like a drumming undertone came the driving tremor of the hull, pounding hum, pounding hum; the ceaseless onward swing of the old vessel, dancing with them, curtseying stiffly to her partner, smashing her wide wet bows into swathes of white darkness. Then the serio-comic yammer of the tune overcame everything, moving pulse and nerves to its rhythm, repeated again and again until it seemed as though the incessant music must cause some actual catabolism in the blood. You remember the song that was the favourite that year:

“When Katie has fits of the vapours  
 And feels that occasional peeve  
 That cuts such irrational capers  
 In the veins of the daughters of Eve,

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There's still one elixir  
That surely can fix her,  
    Whatever depressions may vex—  
    Sitting up late,  
    Tête-à-tête,  
With the So-called Opposite Sex."

Before quitting, they went on deck for a gust of fresh air. He wondered vaguely why he had not enjoyed more of this sort of frolic during the previous eight days. This, evidently, was what life was intended for: he was as healthily and gladly weary as a woodchopper. Would she expect him to offer a few modest endearments? It seemed almost discourteous not to, when the whole world was so lyric and propitious. But as they rounded the windbreak into the full dark blast of the night, they collided with one of the phonograph urchins, embracing and embraced with some earnest young squire. They hurried by and stood a few moments alone forward of the deckhouse. There was a clean cold scourge of wind, a bitter sparkle of stars among cloudy scud.

It was late when she stole gently up Plymouth Sound and anchored in quiet blackness. There was Stygian solemnity in that silent unknown waterway: the red wink of a beacon and the far lights of the town only increased the strangeness. After days of roll and swing, the strong deck seemed lifeless underfoot, while some spirit level in his brain was still tilting to and fro. The good fabric of the ship was suddenly alien and sorry; stairways and passages and smells that had grown dearly familiar could be left behind without a pang. It was truly a death, things that had had close intimacy and service now lost their meaning forever. Glaring electric lights were hung outside, brightening the dead water; slowly into this brilliance came a tender, ominous as Charon's ferry. He waited anxiously to hear the voices of its crew, the voices of ghosts, the voices of another life. It was called *Sir Richard Grenville*, amusing contrast to the last boat whose name he had noticed in New York, the tug *Francis X. McCafferty*. Then, realizing

that the *Sir Richard* was coming for him, he broke from his spell, hurrying to join the drill of departing passengers.

“Stand close about, ye Stygian set,” he thought, remembering Landor, as they crowded together on the small tender, craning upward. The ship loomed over them like an apartment house, the phonograph girls and others, making a night of it before reaching Cherbourg, chirping valediction and rendezvous. As they moved gently away, a curly puff of flame leaped from the ship’s funnel. Some accumulation of soot or gases, momentarily ignited, gushed rosy sparks. He never knew whether this was a customary occurrence or an accident, but for an instant it weirdly strengthened the Stygian colour of the scene. It was as though the glory of her burning vitals, now not spent in threshing senseless sea, must ease itself by some escape. In the hush that followed the passengers’ squeaks of surprise he heard the toy phonograph, poised on the rail, tinning its ultimatum.

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Later, just as he was getting into the boat train, he thought he saw, far down the platform, a glimpse of the gray dress.

So, by night, he entered into fairyland.

WHAT he remembered best of those first days in London was an extraordinary sense of freedom; freedom not merely from external control but also from the uneasy caperings of self. To be in so great a city, unknown and unregarded, was to have the privileged detachment of a god. It was a cleansing and perspective experience, one which few of our gregarious race properly relish. He had no business to transact, no errand to accomplish, no duty to perform. Only to enjoy, to observe, to live in the devotion of the eye. So, in his quiet way, he entered unsuspected into circulation, passing like a well-counterfeited coin. Comedy herself, goddess of that manly island, seemed unaware of him. Occasionally, in the movement of the day, he saw near him others who were evident compatriots, but he felt no impulse to hail and

fraternize. The reticence of that vastly incurious city was an excellent sedative. Once he got out his *My Trip Abroad* album to record some impressions, but desisted after a few lines. "I felt too modest to keep a diary," was his explanation.

Except for the left-hand traffic, which cost him some rapid skipping on street crossings, he encountered no phenomena of surprise. London seemed natural, was exactly what it should be. At first the dusky light led him to believe, every morning, that some fierce downpour was impending; but day after day moved through gossamer tissues and gradations of twilight, even glimmered into cool fawn-coloured sunshine, without the apparently threatened storm. In the arboured Bloomsbury squares morning lay mild as yellow wine; smoke of burning leaves sifted into the sweet opaque air. Noon softly thickened into evening; evening kept tryst with night.

His conviction of being in fairyland, when I come to put down what he said, seemed to rest

on very trifling matters. The little hotel where he stayed was round the corner from a post office, and in an alley thereby were big scarlet vans, with horses, and initialled by the King. These ruddy wagons in the dusk, the reliable shape of policemen's helmets and boots, a bishop in the hotel who fell upon his breakfast haddock as though it were a succulent heresy, the grossness of "small" change, and a black-gowned bar lady in a *bodega* who served glasses of sherry with the air of a duchess—these were some of the details he mentioned. His description of men in the subway, sitting in seats with upholstered arms, smoking pipes and wearing silk hats, was, perhaps, to a New Yorker, more convincing suggestion of sorcery. But apparently the essence of London's gramarye was just that there were no shocking surprises. Fairyland should indeed be where all the incongruous fragments of life might fall into place, and things happen beautifully without indignation or the wrench of comedy. London seemed so reasonable, natural, humane, and

polite. If ever you felt any inclination to be lonely or afraid, he said, the mere look of the taxicabs was reassuring. They were so tall and bulky and respectable; they didn't look "fast," their drivers were settled and genteel. He even formed an idea that London fairies, if encountered, would wear very tiny frock coats and feed on the daintiest minuscule sausages; with mustard, of course; and miniature fried fish after the theatre.

The region where Shaftesbury Avenue and Charing Cross Road transect in an X, like policemen's braces, was his favourite resort. There was no rectitude in the union of these highways, theirs was a gay liaison that had begotten huge families of promiscuous byways and crooked disorderly stepstreets. One parent absorbed in literature, the other gaily theatrical, the young streets had grown up as best they could. In the innumerable bookshops of Charing Cross Road he spent October afternoons; the public lavatory of Piccadilly Circus was near for washing his hands, always necessary

after browsing along second-hand shelves. Then the cafés of Soho were pleasant to retire to, taking with him some volume he had found. No man is lonely while eating spaghetti, for it requires so much attention. He dined early, to visit the pit queues before the theatres opened. There courageous eccentrics sang or juggled or contorted, to coax largesse from the crowd.

It may have been some book he was looking at that sharpened his ear. Outside the bookshop a street piano was grinding, and presently the bathos of the tune, its clapping clanging gusto, became unendurable. It was sad with linked saccharine long drawn out, braying and gulping a fat glutton grief. It had an effect, he said, of sweet spaghetti boiled in tears. It was an air that had been much played on the ship, and for a moment he felt the dingy bookshop float and sway. The verses he had been reading may also have had some effect: poetry, pointed so brutally direct at the personal identity, is only too likely to bring the heart back to itself and its disease

of self-consciousness that is never quite cured. The melody ended and began again. It was a tune concocted specially for dusk, for the hour when filing cases are shut and vanity cases opened; for the dusk, dreadful to solitary men; and he fled down Shaftesbury Avenue to escape. But the deboshed refrain pursued him, it lodged in his fertile cortex like a spore and shot jiggling tendrils along his marrow. The ship, forgotten in these days of fresh experience, returned to his thought. He felt her, rolling the whole pebbled sky and wrinkled sea like a cloak about her wet shoulders; he saw her, still in a dark harbour, gushing a sudden flight of sparks.

I'll wash my hands and go to a show, he thought.

A golden filtration was flowing into the cool dusk of Piccadilly Circus. The imprisoned fire had begun to pace angrily to and fro in the wire cages of advertising signs. Rows of sitting silhouettes, carried smoothly forward on the tops of busses, moved across the pale light.

Black against the shimmer was the figure of a winged boy, lifted on one foot's tiptoe, gazing downward part in mischief, part in serene calculation. His outstretched bow was lax, his hand still drawn back after loosing the string. The frolic knave, tilted in airy balance, gauged the travel of his dart. His curved wings, tremulous to poise him so, seemed visibly to spread and flatten in the diamond air. Along a slant of shadow, where light was grained with slopes of sunset, sped the unseen flash.

And having, as he thought, washed his hands of the matter; coming blithely upstairs from the basin, he received the skewer full in the breast.

The shock thrust him backward upon another pedestrian. "Careful how you poke that umbrella about," someone said. At first he felt dizzy, and did not know what had happened until a warm tingling drew his attention. The thing had pierced clean through him, a little aside of the middle waistcoat button.

It was prettily opalescent, with tawny gilt feathers. Sparkles from the electric signs played

on the slender wand; the feathered butt projected at least eight inches in front of his midriff. Anxiously reaching behind, he felt that an equal length protruded from his back, ending in a barbed head, dreadfully keen.

His first thought was not one of alarm, though he realized that such a perforation might be serious. "Isn't that just my luck," he reflected, "with my new suit on?" For only that morning he had put on his first British tweeds.

The horns of busses and cars, the roar of traffic, seemed very loud: almost like a crash of applause, the great shout of a sport-loving throng acclaiming this champion shot. He stood there, tottering a little, suddenly concentrated full on himself. It was surprising that there was no pain. A hot prickling and trembling, that was all. Indeed he felt unusually alert, and anxious to avoid attracting attention. People might think it somehow ill-mannered to be transfixed like this in such a public place; an American kind of thing to do. He tried to

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pull out the arrow, both forward and backward, but it would not budge; and tugging at it merely suffused his whole system with eddies of fever. Already several people were looking curiously at him. He hastily gathered his loose overcoat, which had been flapping open when he was hit, over the feathery tail. Unpleasantly conscious of the shaft emerging from his back, and which he could not hide, he set off toward the nearest policeman.

As he crossed the darkening and crowded Circus, edging carefully sideways to avoid spitting anyone with his awkward fixture, it appeared more and more difficult to consult a policeman in this matter. The all-competent, solid, and honourable London bobby seemed the last person to whom one would willingly confess so intimate and absurd a humiliation. And as he was not in pain or weakened, but even strangely exhilarated and feeling a desire to sing, when he stood beside the constable he found it difficult to mention the topic.

Without removing his vigilant gaze from the

traffic, the policeman bent a courteous ear down toward him.

"Which bus for Bedford Square?" he found himself asking.

"Number 38, sir." (Or whatever the number was.)

He had intended to remark, as casually as possible, and with his best English lift of intonation, "I say, constable, I've had a little accident, I wonder if you'd help me." But he had a clear vision of the astounded officer halting all the traffic and a morbid crowd gathering to stare while the stalwart fellow placed a huge foot on his chest and hauled out the shaft. He would have to lie down on the pavement; it would be very painful, he might scream. No, it was too public.

"See here, constable," he said nervously, "has anyone been shooting arrows round here?"

Still watching the stream of vehicles, the policeman took his arm in a powerful grasp and held it kindly but firmly until there was a pause. Then he turned and looked at him carefully.

"Not this early in the evening," he said. "Why, the pubs is only just open. Later on, I dare say, the air is thick with 'em. Now, you take my advice, get along 'ome to Bedford Square and 'ave some black coffee."

"Well, look here!" he cried angrily. "What do you think of that?" He flung open his overcoat to show the thin pearly shaft and the sparkling feathers.

The bobby gazed unmoved. "Button up your coat," he advised. "Someone'll nip that nice watch chain." He escorted him to a neighbouring curb.

"Here's where your bus stops. Now, no more o' your nonsense."

The attentive faces of the throng alarmed the young American into silence. He mounted the omnibus, and sat carefully ajar on the outside of a seat, to prevent the arrow striking anything. But even so, three passengers complained that he was jabbing them, and he was put off before they reached Oxford Street.

RETURNED to his hotel, he evaded the talkative doorman and gained the privacy of his chamber. He took off his outer garments, though with some difficulty, and studied his casualty. The arrow had caused no laceration or visible injury; it had pierced him as cleanly as a needle would enter a pudding. He was aware of a warm tickling, a quickening excitement threaded through some inmost node of his being. The unreasonable missile had traversed some region more intimate even than heart or brain or anything palpable. It seemed to be lodged in his very identity, in some surprised and tender essence he could only describe as Me. He tried to break off the projecting ends of the dart; but when he wrenched and twisted, it proved strangely flexible though apparently so glassy and brittle. He backed against the

window, hooked the barbed point over the sill, and gave a gigantic heave to pull it out. It was immovable, and the effort only left him dizzy and shaken, with flying volleys of anguish that scattered down every frantic nerve. He desisted and sat for a while almost faint while the chair twirled under him and the delicate engine shone and burned and quivered in his vitals. Now it glowed and sparkled with frolic lustre until he was almost proud of so singular a stickpin; now it paled and dwindled until he clutched at his breast to see if it were really there.

He was roused by the dinner gong. Evidently he must make plans to carry on his life with this fantastic inherent. He rang for hot water. When the chambermaid appeared he was standing in his shirt sleeves directly under the light, waiting anxiously to see if she would cry out when she noticed his condition. Chambermaids, he reasoned, are trained to observe anything unusual.

She brought the water, drew the blinds, and turned down the bed without comment. He

stood rotating under the lamp so that she could see him from all angles.

"Chambermaid," he said nervously, "I wonder if you would——"

He hesitated, realizing that someone in the hall might overhear. He closed the door. The maid looked surprised, as his previous conduct in the house had given no suggestion of eccentricity.

He wished he knew her name: it would have made it easier, somehow, to call her Betsy or Maggie.

"My shirt," he said, struggling for an easy familiar tone. "I want you to help me with my shirt."

"It's a pretty pattern, ain't it sir?" she remarked cheerfully. "Oh, you want it mended, don't you. It's torn, what a pity; you must've caught it on a nail."

"Yes, but how about the back?" he asked, turning. "Is that torn too?"

"Oh, Lor', sir, so it is; a nasty little 'ole."

"Is that all?"

"Well, beg pardon, sir. I b'lieve your undervest's tore too, let me—ouch!"

She gave a squeak.

"What's the matter?" he cried.

"That's not fair!" she exclaimed angrily, rubbing her plump forearm, evidently puzzled whether this was a practical joke or some new method of beginning a flirtation.

His spirits improved at this evidence of the arrow's invisibility. Keeping at a discreet distance, he suggested that she must have pricked herself on some fastening in her dress.

"All I say is, it's taking a liberty to go showing pins into people that's trying to be 'elpful."

He pacified her by making a generous offer for the repair of his linen.

"You see," he explained, "the doctor says I don't get enough ventilation. He wants me to have a little loophole in the front and back of my clothes—then there'll always be a current of air. Now if you'll do that for me, I mean cut out the holes and hem them, I'll give you a pound."

"It'll be blessed draughty with winders cut in your cloes," she said. "You ain't seen a London winter. 'Owever, it's your fun'ral, not mine. A quid? I'll embroider them 'oles proper for a quid."

He went down to dinner somewhat fortified. It was the first time he had taken any meal except breakfast in the hotel, and his arrival agitated the head waiter, a small pallid creature troubled by any sudden decision. He had to stand in full publicity while a table was found for him, but none of the diners noticed any oddity in his outline. If they only knew, he thought.

The places against the wall were all occupied; he must take one in the centre of the room; and he discovered that when he sat the butt of the arrow exactly encountered the edge of the board, while the point protruded below the top rail of the open chairback. He had to sit far out, reaching his food at arm's length; worse still, this brought him dangerously near an adjoining table, where the Bishop was. The head waiter,

perpetually anxious about offending someone or inadvertently making some blunder in sedentary precedences, presently approached to push in his seat for him. The American foresaw the manœuvre just in time, and leaped to his feet; the servant, very much startled, apologized, wondering what error had been committed. He managed to frame some explanation about a sudden cramp in his foot, and prevented a second attempt on the chair by saying that a leg of the table was in the way. But the waiter, with the timorous obstinacy of his kind, hung about zealously. Already a number of eyes were on them, keen with that specially recognizable disapproval which human beings exhibit when anyone behaves queerly in a dining room. Even the Bishop, who was doing wonders with some sort of steaming jam roll, looked halfway round.

“It was really damned embarrassing,” he told me. “By some accidental recommendation I had fallen into a hotel—or *an* hotel, as they called it—that catered solely to English. A

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Continental or American visitor was almost unheard of; most of their patrons, as I noted in the register, had such extravagantly British names as Mrs. Elphin-Elphinstone, The Moated Grange, Monk Hopton, Salop. There was even a Lady in the house, for, turning over the mail on the hall table, I had noted a letter delightfully addressed to Nurse Edwards, care of Lady Smithers; you can hardly guess how unco that seemed to me. As for the Bishop, I don't know that he really was one; I call him so because that was the impression he gave me, but he may have been something even more mysterious, such as a Prebendary. Anyhow, in those first days I had been pleasantly aware of having slipped by good hazard into a pure tissue of England. I had been faced by unfamiliar questions, propounded with sacred solemnity, as when that fool waiter would ask if I wanted thick soup or clear; or my coffee black or white; or sweet or savoury? But I had successfully disguised my excitements, happy just not to be noticed. Now this was all ended. The villainy of

chance had marked me with a stigma sure to make me grotesque, and not even pitiable because it could not be seen. I wondered desperately, as I carefully conveyed my soup in long trajectory toward my mouth, whether a cube of that solid Yorkshire pudding of theirs could be used as a buffer on the point of my arrow, to prevent the waitress from spearing herself. She was an enthusiastic girl and kept rushing toward the narrow space between my chair and the Bishop's with relays of Brussels sprouts or stewed cheese; and each time I had to turn hurriedly and reach for whatever she brought before she could get behind me.

"In this morbid sharpening of my senses, I'm afraid I may have returned a little resentfully the gazes that came my way. The fact is, I was studying the other guests more closely than before. I envied them their perfect adaptation to the scene, their rich normality, their subconscious certainty that what they were doing was regular and right. They could not possibly have guessed that their fresh gobbling

voices, their simultaneous use of knife and fork, the actual food they ate and clothes they wore, were all astounding to me: they were happy, bless them, because they were unaware of themselves, just as I had been; their tender psyche was not spitted like an unchloroformed butterfly. I thought bitterly how mad a man is to come abroad, for it makes him sensible of the strangeness of life instead of merging undissenting into it, which is the only peace. But queerer still: as soon as *my* behaviour became indecorously odd, as it now unavoidably was, they seemed more cordial. I suppose that in some way the report had gone round that I was an American; well, as long as my demeanour was indistinct from that of any other well-behaved young man, they were gently disappointed; but when I showed signs of strangeness it satisfied some vague notion in their minds. And in the oblique profile of the Bishop, as I glanced over my shoulder, I could divine the enigmatic radiation of a man who is about to say something. I watched him apprehensively, and

when he pushed his chair back, I got hastily to my feet. He seemed surprised at what he can only have thought an excessive courtesy; but he had his cup in his hand and asked me, most charmingly, if he might take coffee at my table.

"I may as well admit that he captivated me at once. I had thought, watching him a few times at breakfast, that there was a certain ludicrous discrepancy between his clean-shaven austerity and the extreme gusto with which he approached his food and his morning *Times*. I could imagine him removing from his mind things in the paper that disagreed with him just as efficiently as he set aside bones in his haddock. But, after all, I don't know why a bishop shouldn't enjoy his meals as heartily as anyone else. And here he was, the star boarder, in pure goodness of heart taking pains to be gracious to a young alien. His clear gray eyes were so magnificently direct, it seemed incredible he should not see my gruesome predicament. In pursuit of theological niceties he must have accepted without question many para-

doxes just as puzzling as my arrow; but he showed no sign. I yearned to confess my trouble. Who better than a bishop should be able to understand and console my difficulty? But, curiously, I saw in him the same ruddy benign solidity, the same aversion from surprise that had made it difficult to appeal to the policeman. I suspected that he was being kind to me on the tacit understanding that I would behave more or less as he expected me to; and I made a resolute attempt to hide my distress. I tucked my napkin over the hole in my waistcoat and welcomed him as courteously as possible.

“‘I trust you won’t think I’m intruding,’ he said, ‘but I heard you were an American going up to Oxford, and as an old Oxonian myself I wanted to wish you luck. I suppose you are a Rhodes Scholar?’

“I assented.

“‘I met a most charming Rhodes Scholar once, also from Ohio,’ he continued. (I wish you could have heard his genial pronunciation of the

word, equally accenting all three syllables.)  
'A fine, manly fellow. It has been an excellent thing for the old varsity to have so many young Americans; you seem to bring us a freshness of outlook, vigorous high spirits that we need.'

"I feared inwardly that he must be disappointed in me as an example of high spirits.

"'I suppose you have already graduated from some American university,' he said. 'I wonder if it could be Princetown? I had a friendly invitation from there at one time, to lecture in the Divinity School. No? Having taken a degree already makes your men a little more mature in some ways than our undergraduates.'

"I explained that I was twenty-two. I did not insist how considerable an age it then seemed.

"'Which college are you going to at Oxford?' he asked.

"'St. John's.'

"'Ah, quite one of the best. You will be very happy there. Trinity was my shop, but I often used to go to John's for meetings of the Archery

Club. Perhaps you didn't know that there's great enthusiasm at St. John's about their historic Archery Club. They have marvellous lunches and then go out in the garden to shoot with bows and arrows. Sometimes, when the lunch has been excessive, it's a bit dangerous, arrows flying round all over the place. But it's quite the leading club at John's; it would be an amusing experience for you if you were elected.'

"I was far too depressed to enter with much enthusiasm into the notion of the Archery Club, or tell him that I would make a singularly appropriate member. I was realizing that, of course, my whole Oxford career, so eagerly anticipated, was completely blighted. Undergraduates, more than any others, are children of conformity, and anyone so cruelly unique must necessarily be a pariah. I mumbled doleful replies while he chatted kindly on. But the arrow fretted me with stealthy fire, and the cleric's amiable regard became rather pebbly. His was an established mind, neatly reticulated into a seemly satisfying world; the slightest

whisper of my furious fancies would have pained him unspeakably. The obvious necessity for concealing everything I was really thinking about made me gloomy and solemn.

“I’m glad you approach your studies in a serious spirit,” he said finally. ‘You won’t be wasting your time in mere pranks.’

“He finished his coffee and rose. Sunk in private misery, I forgot to rise with him. He turned to pick up his napkin from the next table, and standing so backed directly on my naked barb. It reached him blithely in the postern, honouring him in the breech as Hamlet might have said; that chub elastic region certainly had not been so invaded since he was an urchin at school. At the moment I was absently finishing my savoury; when I heard him leap and yell I turned aghast; he, seeing me fork in hand, can only have thought I had wantonly prodded him in sheer overplus of savagery. The head waiter came running; the other guests stared to see the admired prelate distractedly chafing his postremity and glaring

excommunication. 'Let me explain,' I cried wildly, ready to confess all and cast myself on his mercy; but the very phrase condemned me. I will not elaborate the dreadful scene. I still remember the face of the head waiter. If it had been Mrs. Elphin-Elphinstone herself who had been impaled, he could not have been more scandalized. There was only one decency possible. I packed, paid my bill, called a taxi, and sought another lodging. It occurred to me, in the cab, that perhaps I should have sent for Nurse Edwards, care of Lady Smithers, and offered to pay for a compress or tourniquet. But a tourniquet would have been awkward."

A LONG and restless night gave ample opportunity for meditation. Sleep was difficult: he had to lie accurately on edge, and could not turn over on the other side without first getting out of bed. If he dozed into peaceful oblivion some uncanny movement would jar the weapon and bring him back to his affliction. There it was, fantastic, inextricable, struck through the very pulse of his consciousness. Besides being infernally uncomfortable, the thing suggested further privations. A life of celibacy, for instance—a thought distasteful to young men. If it had not been for a bottle of brandy in his luggage he would hardly have slept at all; but he discovered that generous potations seemed to dull the point of the shaft and make it smaller. A lukewarm consolation crept into his mind: perhaps everyone else was also concealing some equally embarrassing anguish—a secret

that perhaps did not take the same awkward shape, but was just as disturbing.

The following day the arrow baffled him by showing itself strangely variable. As he slunk shamefully from his lodging it seemed as big as a harpoon; he hailed a taxi, to avoid any possible collision, and went to the Express Company. There, after a difficult time standing sideways in the line of people pressing vigorously toward the teller's grill, he managed to cash a check. He was leaving, intending to visit an American doctor, when he was greeted by an old crony who came boisterously forward. He dodged behind a pillar and extended his hand warily. His friend, thinking this a drollery of some sort, laughed gaily and peered round the column. "What's on your chest?" he cried, noting the furtive behaviour. The sufferer's hand flew to his wishbone, but the remark was purely accidental, for the encumbrance had now shrunk to such modest size that he could lap his overcoat over the feathery butt and guard the rearward point by covering it with

one gloved hand behind his back. Encouraged, he postponed medical consultation and, as his friend would not be shaken off, they lunched together. For a couple of hours, when he privily rummaged in his bosom, he could have sworn there was nothing there. Yet it returned again later, pricking him with impossible suggestions, so that he had to stand apart round less frequented street corners, struggling to master the glittering thing by strong force of will; or else hire a taxi and ride expensively secure until it shrank to manageable dimension.

But, without committing himself in any way, he had learned from his friend one fact which promised to be helpful. At the American Embassy there was a young man employed who was, as the customary tautology has it, a fraternity brother of theirs. This means that the young official was bound, by some juvenile severities of their Greek-letter union, to mutual succour in distress. So in one of the ante-rooms of the Embassy's business office we see the stricken one mysteriously consulting his fellow

Hellenist. There was an exchange of passwords as Greek met Greek, though not in any accent approvable by Liddell and Scott; and the visitor displayed, for identification, a generous sheaf of testimonials from Middle-Western pastors and pedagogues. With these muniments Rhodes Scholars are always plentifully provided. The attaché, who, with spats and cut-away and a conviction that no gentleman sallies abroad without a cane, had also put on a certain fatigue of the homeland simplicities, glanced hastily through the assurances that his brother was of modest and winning nature, a fine influence in the Christian life of the community, a brilliant scholar, a leader of glee clubs, and a triple-threat halfback. He noticed that, in spite of these resources, the caller looked somewhat haggard, exhaled a faint vapour of cognac, and had a curious habit of standing averted, holding one arm doubled back behind his shoulders. He prepared himself with several irrefutable reasons why the Ambassador was not at liberty.

"See here," said the caller, in whom after several days of wretchedness the sentiment of anger was now uttermost, "is this the place to file a complaint against the British Government?"

The young diplomat was fully aware that complaints against the British, or any other government, were rarely efficacious. And his promotion, slow at best, depended largely on his finesse in preventing the channels of communication from being choked with the assorted woes of American travellers. Accordingly he had framed a polite theorem for the various emergencies of his bureau, to the effect that the United States Government, though undoubtedly a sovereign power, cannot safeguard its citizens against all the miscellaneous vexations of life. This apothegm, though frequently in use, he was always able to utter as if freshly inspired for the immediate instance. It was ready to his lips, but something in the manner of his inquirer led him to a more comradely candour.

"Why, yes," he said, "if necessary. But I doubt if it'll do much good. And it depends on the nature of the complaint. If it's an income tax ——"

"It's no use my trying to explain. You wouldn't believe me. I've been to a doctor and all he can suggest is that it's a case of *hyperaesthesia sagittaria*. He's delighted about it, but then he doesn't have to live with it."

"You'll pardon me, I'm sure," said the attaché, "but if you can state the nature of the grievance——"

"I've drawn up a document about the whole affair," said the plaintiff, producing a manuscript. "Now, remember, this is entirely confidential except as regards official channels. But it's the only recourse I have. If you'll run your eye over this——"

The clerk read:

WHEREAS ——, a citizen of the United States of America, 22 years of age, residing temporarily at 18, Torrington Square, London, desires to make complaint against H. M. Government as follows:

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Whereas on the 3rd day of October instant, about the hour of five P. M., the said —, on his lawful occasions and peaceably pursuing his own concerns, was walking through Piccadilly Circus, when a missile nearest describable as an arrow, projected by person or persons unknown, did so strike and transfix the body and soul of said — that he has thereafter gone in peril of his life and wits. And whereas the said arrow is not by any ascertainable means removable from the body of the plaintiff, and whereas it has afflicted him grievously in mind, body, and estate, subjecting him to extreme humiliations and necessitating medical treatment for a highly nervous and excited condition and repeated hire of motor taxicabs to prevent embarrassing H. M. subjects on the sidewalks; and whereas the petitioner feels his future career and tranquillity gravely compromised by this affliction, he respectfully submits that it is the plain duty of H. M. Government, acting through the London County Council or any other lawful body, to keep the region of Piccadilly Circus free of such random projectiles and that neglect of such precautions has resulted in a delict upon the person of a citizen of the United States.

Your petitioner therefore prays that damages be awarded commensurate with the offence, and that the American Ambassador in London be instructed to make representations to that end to the officers of H. M. Government.

“But I don’t see any arrow,” objected the fraternity brother.

“Hush! Not so loud!” said the petitioner, looking round nervously at several other

citizens who were waiting their turn to make complaints. He leaned across the counter and whispered hoarsely.

The clerk seemed a little shocked. He read the document again and privately concluded that the Ohio chapters of Nu Nu Phi ought to be more careful in their elections. But one business of an embassy is to allow Time to anoint its healing lotion upon human abrasions, and he fell back on sound governmental principles.

"Well," he said, "I'll put this through the proper routine. But don't expect questions to be asked about it in Parliament next week. First it'll have to go before some Congressional committee in Washington, I suppose, and when they see the word *arrow* they'll probably refer it to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Also, it must pass through our legal department here, to be put in correct form."

But he was almost ashamed of his flippancy when he saw the exalted earnestness of the other man.

"Did you ever have a secret so important,"

asked the caller, "that no one could possibly be told, and yet everyone knew it anyhow?"

"Why, sure; that's what embassies are for, to deny that sort of thing." As he spoke he thought anxiously of his own secrecies: private experiments with a monocle that he had never dared wear publicly, and that it was near closing time and he had an engagement to meet a young lady for tea at Rumpelmayer's.

"Put your hand here," the caller said, opening his overcoat.

The attaché did as directed. He felt a sharp sting and a warm hypodermic sparkle snaked up his arm. For an instant he was giddy, the office behind him with its terraced filing cases seemed to rock and grow dim. He clung to the counter as to the bulwark of a ship. He heard music faintly played, the light chatter of voices, and in a brightness soft as candleshine he saw the face of the damsel at Rumpelmayer's.

He steadied himself, fixing his mind on the tight-lipped engraving of George Washington.

"Really, you know . . . sorcery . . . I'm not sure that this comes under the scope of this office."

The impatience of several ladies waiting attention began to be audible.

"Do what you can," said the plaintiff, and repeated the covenant of their Greek-letter federation. He left, making a wide zigzag to give the other clients a safe offing. The attaché, concealing behind the counter a hasty glance at his wrist watch, assigned two elderly ladies to a confrère and selected the younger one for himself. The only consolation in this job, he reflected, was that perplexity did sometimes descend upon travelling citizens who were really attractive; but even so, not as alluring as the graceful creature who would soon be in St. James's Street, taking her tea and pastry with only one hand.

THE plaintiff in Torrington Square was surprised to receive, a few days later, a letter from the American Embassy. It was embossed with the official seal of the United States, which he was startled to observe consisted of an eagle with excessively straddled legs one of which held a cluster of arrows and the other a foliage that he took to be an olive bough. Arrows, he thought ironically, he could supply for himself; the message, written in the attaché's own hand, was evidently intended to be of the nature of the olive branch. It was informal and cordial.

"Your statement," he read, "is having due attention. I have been thinking about the matter and, speaking as a friend and brother in old Nunu, I believe perhaps you take it too seriously. I think that when you get up to Oxford the pleasant surroundings of that peaceful

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place will soon remedy the condition; in the meantime I suggest that you enjoy some innocent diversion. Nothing is more entertaining than a professional Anglo-American Hands Across the Sea meeting, so I am enclosing a ticket to the annual luncheon of the Atlantic Harmony. You will find this well worth attending, Lord Aliquot is to take the chair and Admiral Stripes, U. S. N., will be one of the speakers. Yours cordially."

The date set for the luncheon was the day before he would leave for Oxford. He decided to go.

The attaché was right: one of those meetings at which the two chief branches of the Anglo-Saxon race convene to confess their mutual esteem is indeed fruitful study for the pensive. The Atlantic Harmony lunched in the ball-room of a huge hotel; behind the high table the banners of both nations were draped and blended; an orchestra in the gallery burst into traditional airs; cocktails began and champagne followed. Dishes sacred to England and Amer-

ica were on the menu, and judging by the notable bulk of most of the ladies, there was no danger of the race perishing of starvation. It was an orgy of friendly sentiment; for the time being the Atlantic Ocean seemed a mere trickle; one had to remind one's self that only the fortunately high rate of steamship fares prevented two mutually infatuated populations from putting their affections to the proof *en masse*. Even a man with a serious gravamen pending against the British Government could not resist the general infection of good will. He waited in the lobby until the crowd had gone in, which made it possible to reach his seat without spiking anyone; and by the time the wine had made a few circulations he was in excellent humour. Contemplating the worthy people who are drawn by irresistible magnetism to affairs of this sort, he began to wonder what was the law forbidding Anglo-American friendship to be endorsed by the young and slender. The ladies were mostly silvery and, in the case of his immediate neighbours, deaf; and the gentlemen

solid; but their enthusiasm was terrific. References by Lord Aliquot to the Mother Country, cousins, blood thicker than water, the critical days of 1917, the language of Shakespeare, Magna Charta, Your Great President, were received with instantaneous crashes of applause. Admiral Stripes, forgetting the extreme efficiency of the submarine cables, very nearly made Lord Aliquot a present of the United States Navy. Lord Aliquot, after humorously remarking that he himself had made the supreme sacrifice for Anglo-American union by marrying an American wife, insisted that nothing could go seriously wrong between two nations nurtured in the same sense of fair play and reverence for pure womanhood. His Lordship, an old hand at these affairs, took care to end each paragraph with an obvious bait for applause. This gave him time to be quite sure that the next one would not contain anything regrettable. An American minister, chaplain of the Harmony, offered a prayer for all branches of the English-Speaking Peoples,

on whom heavier than elsewhere rests the great burden of human liberty. If any Frenchman had been taken, manacled, into the room, and compelled to listen to the speeches, he would have ended in convulsions. In short, it was one of those occasions, familiar to statesmen, that cannot possibly do any harm and offer a hard-working nonconformist parson a free meal and an opportunity to address the Deity in public. Meanwhile, the Swiss and German waiters scoured about busily, the champagne flowed, and when "Dixie" was played, many who had never seen a cotton field scrambled up and shouted in pure hysteria.

During the halloo that followed "Dixie" he rose and cheered with the rest. Then he saw, sitting opposite across the large round table, a girl who had been hidden from him by a bushy centrepiece of flowers. She was dark, with close-cropped hair; a little absent-looking, as though she did not take this luncheon very seriously; she had a cloak thrown over her shoulders. He was just raising his glass, with a vague intention

of toasting the universe at large, when he caught her gaze. They studied each other solemnly, as becomes strangers crossing unexpectedly in so large a waste. Then, in the flush of the moment, he smiled and lifted his glass. She reached for hers, and they drank, look to look. Then, a little embarrassed, he sat down.

But something in her face or gesture fretted him, bothered him as does a cut-off telephone call; he was waiting and wondering. He tried to get another glimpse of her, but the floral piece was impenetrable. There was no time to lose: one of the neighbouring matrons was asking him what was that music which had just been played, and the chairman was already hammering for silence. He stood up again for one more look, and saw that the man on her left, elevated by champagne and the gallant megalomania of the occasion, was still erect and vocal. He also saw how far back she sat from the table. Her hand, stretched out at arm's length, still lingered on the wine glass stem.

He ran round to her side of the table, and seized the joyful gentleman. "Quick!" he said. "They want us to change places. Makes it more sociable!" The other gaily assented, and took his place between the two dowagers; nor did he ever discover their infirmity.

"Aren't you warm with that cloak on?" he asked. "Can I take it off for you?"

Her quick little movement of alarm, drawing the wrap closer round her, showed him he had not made a mistake. But he did not pause to wonder at his certainty. Shy as he had always been, now it was as though he looked at a woman for the first time, and saw not the strange capricious nymph of legend but the appealing creature of warmth and trouble, ridiculous as himself. Perhaps it was the grotesque pangs of the previous days that had tutored him. Terror of other human beings had vanished; his blemish was not shameful but something to be proud of; and his next words were divinely inspired—they were brief but exactly right.

"You darling," he said.

The clapping that followed was probably intended for the Viscount Aliquot, but it came too pat to be ignored.

"And that's the first thing that's been said here that was really worth applause," he added.

She looked at him steadily, something in her eyes that might once have been terror changing into amusement; and then returned her gaze to Lord Aliquot, who seemed very far away, gesticulating at the other end of the great room. "You mustn't talk while people are whispering," she said.

She couldn't possibly have been any different, he thought triumphantly. He had a strong conviction that those dark eyebrows, the delightful soft stubble at the base of her boyish neck, that wistfully shortened upper lip had always been growing and curving like that just intentionally for him. He was waiting hopefully (as was Lord Aliquot) for Lord Aliquot to be interrupted by another round of applause.

"Of course the proper thing to say," he murmured, "would be, Haven't we met before somewhere? But it's more important to know, When are we going to meet again?"

"We haven't parted yet."

"Splendid. But are you going to listen to me or to the speeches?"

"Evidently I can't do both."

"Well, there'll be a National Anthem soon; I can feel it coming. They'll all stand up, and we can slip away. Besides, it always embarrasses me to sing 'The Star-Spangled Banner' before strangers. Let's go and have tea somewhere."

"But we haven't finished lunch yet."

"Don't let's waste time. I've got to go to Oxford to-morrow. By the way, if you had a gray dress with a little frill down the back, on what sorts of occasions would you wear it?"

"Why, right here; but I can't, it's got a hole in it."

He leaned toward her, to whisper something, and the ends of their arrows touched. There

was a clear puff of sparkling brightness, like two highly charged wires making contact. Some weary guests at the speakers' table brisked up and felt their cravats, believing the time for the flashlight pictures had come. Lord Aliquot, taking it for some sort of signal, called the company to their feet for the American Anthem.

"Hurry! if we wait they'll get beyond the words they know, then everyone will spot us beating it."

They reached the door before anyone except Lord Aliquot had got beyond "What so proudly we hailed."

"What so proudly we hailed," he said, as the words pursued them into the lobby. "That suggests taxies. Let's grab one."

"ANTHEM? Nonsense, we've just had one."

But then they saw the old fellow meant a hansom. There it was, drawn up by the --

"Bet you don't know how they spell curb over here," he said as they climbed in. "They spell it K, E, R, B. You know it's the first time I ever rode in one of these things. Who's that talking to us from the sky?"

They looked up and saw a curious portrait floating upside down above them. It was framed in a little black square, like an old Flemish master—the colour of Tudor brick grizzled with lichen. It proved to be the face of the lisping cabby.

"Oh, anywhere where one does drive in London."

"I want to see the Serpentine," she said.  
"I'm always reading about it."

"Very good, mith." The brick portrait floated a moment genially and then said with bronchial jocularity, "Adam and Eve and the Therpentine." They laughed—the sudden perfect laughter of those overtaken unawares by the excellence of the merry-making world. The cab tilted, jingled, swayed off, rolling lightly like a canoe.

"Of course this is simply magic. Things just don't happen like this," he said as they settled themselves. "Are you comfortable? If I put my arm round you, it would prevent the point of yours from punching into the seat. You see, I can sit sort of diagonal, and then if you slide over this way——"

"It gives me a spinal frill when it touches anything," she admitted.

He looked at her amazed.

"Yes, that girl on the ship told me what you said. She was my roommate."

"Why didn't I ever see you on board?"

"You did, but you didn't look at me."

"I'll make up for it now."

"Besides, I was ill. Not just seasick ill, ill in my mind. Don't let me go in a ship again—it's too elemental."

The tips of the two arrows touched, and again there was a little fizzing flash. Just the thing for lighting cigarettes, they found, and practised it.

"As a matter of fact I have two arms," he added presently.

"The dusk comes early in London," she said.

"You darling," he repeated, saying it with the accent that can only be uttered in a hansom.

"I think mine's loose," she said. "It seems to waggle a little."

"Mine doesn't bother me a bit as long as we sit like this."

"I thought I was mad."

"So did I. Now I know it. I went to an astrologer, one of those fellows in a dressing gown on Oxford Street. He asked me my birthday, December 21st. He said that I came just

between two signs of the Zodiac, Sagittarius and the Goat. I guess I'm both of them at once."

Rocking lightly, tingling like a tray of highballs, the cab jingled. Music came from somewhere—a street piano perhaps—the same old tune, drifting sadly on waves of soft smoky air; a mendicant melody with no visible means of support. They called to the cabby to follow it, they pursued the vagrant chords down unknown ways of dusk, while London behind them muted its rhythm to a pounding hum. At last they found the minstrel, pulled up beside him, and startled him by their new method of lighting cigarettes.

"I'm still not quite sure of the difference between a half-crown and a florin," he said.

"Then give him both."

When they reached the Serpentine it was too dark to appreciate it.

"Let's bruise it with our heel," she said. "I mean, let's go somewhere. Let's go home, wherever that is."

"Where was it we first met?" He searched his memory. "Long ago. Yes, at that hotel. We'll go back there to tea."

"Is it all right to feel a bit queer in a hansom cab? I mean, almost as though you were on board a ship? I guess I'm worried about my arrow. It doesn't seem to fit as well as it did. My precious arrow. . . ."

His also was trembling strangely. Two lonelienesses must always feel disconcerted when they encounter.

"Darling, darling"; and as she came close into his arms with a queer shudder, the two sparkling darts slipped quietly to the back of the seat.

In the palm room of that hotel is a ceiling of painted mythology. While you wait for anyone who may be coming to have tea with you, you can examine a series of episodes gracefully conjectured from the life of a famous family. First there is Aphrodite, rising alluringly from the foam of a blue sea whose crumbling surf is

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pink with sunrise. Then there is the marriage, if one calls it so, of Aphrodite and Hephæstus—Vulcan, if you prefer, the fellow the Swedes name their matches for. It was a queer marriage for so handsome a goddess when Aphrodite became the first Mrs. Smith; but handsome women so often choose odd-looking men. Then there's their small boy, Eros, with the toy bow and arrows his father made for him, asking Vulcan to sharpen the darts for him; and his father, busy about thunderbolts, replying that the toys are quite sharp enough. In the last scene Eros, grown to a braw lad-die, is trying a chance shot at Psyche. You generally have plenty of time to study all four scenes.

In that hour, late for tea and early for dinner, the palm room was comfortably quiet. The hotel, after the fitful fever of the Atlantic Harmony, slept well. The occasional clink of a teaspoon or a thicker waft of cigarette smoke rising through foliage gave the only trace of what various big game lurked in that jungle.

An orchestra groaned softly somewhere far away. It was all so extremely hotel-like, they might just as well have still been on board a ship.

"By the way," he said, "you haven't told me how you happened to go to that lunch."

"Why, it was a young man at the Embassy. He gave me a ticket when I went there to complain about Piccadilly Circus. I mean, about arrows flying round like that. It shouldn't be allowed."

It was at this moment that he noticed the ceiling. It interested him so that he stood up and cricked his neck to see it accurately.

"Have you had all the tea you need? I've got an idea. There's an errand we ought to do." He carefully picked up the arrows which he had laid under his chair.

The hansom was outside.

"Why, it's still waiting!" she cried. "'What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming.'"

"He must have come back for us. I guess he knows the symptoms."

"The blessed old thing."

"And for all he knew, he might have had to wait till to-morrow."

She made no reply to this, but skipped lightly in. The charioteer leaned indulgently downward, his head on one side, like a disillusioned old centaur looking kindly upon the pranks of a couple of young demigods.

"Well, guvner, which way thith time? 'Amp-ththead 'eath?"

"We want to go and look at a statue."

"Lord love a duck, guvner, the gallerieth ith clothed."

"The statue in Piccadilly Circus. What do they call it?"

"'Im? Why that'th Cupid."

They drew up in a side street and crossed the crowded space on foot. Happy as he was, quit of the infernal pang, once more oblivious of terror, mortal loneliness, and dismay, yet the cicatrix of the arrow was still tender. For an

instant, as she pressed close beside him, he realized that none of these exquisite moments could be lived again.

The same bobby was directing the traffic; the same imprisoned fires paced like tigers on the rooftops. The winged boy, tiptoe in jaunty malice, was black against the emerald sky. He pointed to the dainty silhouette of the bow.

"A circus is where one would expect to find sharpshooters," she said.

He climbed past the flower girls, who were arranging their stock of evening boutonnières, and laid the two shining arrows at the base of the frolic statue.

"Here, you dropped something," he said to Eros.

The flower sellers, shrewdest critics of romance in the most romantic city in the world, held out their nosegays. But the two did not see.

"Well, we're only young once," he said.

‘But there’s two of us. That makes us young twice.’

“I suppose at least we ought to know each other’s names.”

“It’s so much nicer not to.”

“Much. Let’s be just P and Q.”

“P for Psyche?”

“And Q for Cupid.”

They walked back to where the cab was waiting.

“Do we have to mind them?” she asked.

“What?”

“Our P’s and Q’s.”

“Hop in, you adorable idiot.”

“Where to, guvner?”

“Wherever you please.”

“Hullo, it’s the same hotel. He thinks we’re staying here.”

“Maybe he’s right.”

“But we haven’t any baggage. Not even our arrows.”

“I can fix that.”

“Sorry, guvner, but I’m off. The mare’th

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earned 'er tea. Will you be goin' out agin to-night?"

"What are you going to tell him?" she asked in sudden panic.

"Nothing. I want to hear you do it."

How delicious her voice was:

"You needn't wait."





# PARNASSUS ON WHEELS

To  
H. B. F. and H. F. M.  
“Trusty, dusky, vivid, true”

A LETTER TO  
**David Grayson, Esq.**

OF HEMPFIELD, U. S. A.

MY DEAR SIR,

Although my name appears on the title page, the real author of this book is Miss Helen McGill (now Mrs. Roger Mifflin), who told me the story with her own inimitable vivacity. And on her behalf I want to send to you these few words of acknowledgment.

Mrs. Mifflin, I need hardly say, is unskilled in the arts of authorship: this is her first book, and I doubt whether she will ever write another. She hardly realized, I think, how much her story owes to your own delightful writings. There used to be a well-thumbed copy of "Adventures in Contentment" on her table at the Sabine Farm, and I have seen her pick it up, after a long day in the kitchen, read it with chuckles, and say that the story of you and Harriet reminded her of herself and Andrew. She used to mutter something about "Adven-

tures in Discontentment” and ask why Harriet’s side of the matter was never told? And so when her own adventure came to pass, and she was urged to put it on paper, I think she unconsciously adopted something of the manner and matter that you have made properly yours.

Surely, sir, you will not disown so innocent a tribute! At any rate, Miss Harriet Grayson, whose excellent qualities we have all so long admired, will find in Mrs. Mifflin a kindred spirit.

Mrs. Mifflin would have said this for herself, with her characteristic definiteness of speech, had she not been out of touch with her publishers and foolscap paper. She and the Professor are on their Parnassus, somewhere on the high roads, happily engrossed in the most godly diversion known to man—selling books. And I venture to think that there are no volumes they take more pleasure in recommending than the wholesome and invigorating books which bear your name.

Believe me, dear Mr. Grayson, with warm regards,

Faithfully yours,  
CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.

## CHAPTER ONE

I WONDER if there isn't a lot of bunkum in higher education? I never found that people who were learned in logarithms and other kinds of poetry were any quicker in washing dishes or darning socks. I've done a good deal of reading when I could, and I don't want to "admit impediments" to the love of books, but I've also seen lots of good, practical folk spoiled by too much fine print. Reading sonnets always gives me hic-cups, too.

I never expected to be an author! But I do think there are some amusing things about the story of Andrew and myself and how books broke up our placid life. When John Gutenberg, whose real name (so the Professor says) was John Gooseflesh, borrowed that money to set up his printing press he launched a lot of troubles on the world.

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Andrew and I were wonderfully happy on the farm until he became an author. If I could have foreseen all the bother his writings were to cause us, I would certainly have burnt the first manuscript in the kitchen stove.

Andrew McGill, the author of those books every one reads, is my brother. In other words, I am his sister, ten years younger. Years ago Andrew was a business man, but his health failed and, like so many people in the story books, he fled to the country, or, as he called it, to the bosom of Nature. He and I were the only ones left in an unsuccessful family. I was slowly perishing as a conscientious governess in the brownstone region of New York. He rescued me from that and we bought a farm with our combined savings. We became real farmers, up with the sun and to bed with the same. Andrew wore overalls and a soft shirt and grew brown and tough. My hands got red and blue with soapsuds and frost; I never saw a Redfern advertisement from one year's end to another, and my kitchen was a battlefield where I set my teeth and learned to love hard work. Our literature was government agricul-

ture reports, patent medicine almanacs, seedsmen's booklets, and Sears Roebuck catalogues. We subscribed to *Farm and Fireside* and read the serials aloud. Every now and then, for real excitement, we read something stirring in the Old Testament—that cheery book Jeremiah, for instance, of which Andrew was very fond. The farm did actually prosper, after a while; and Andrew used to hang over the pasture bars at sunset, and tell, from the way his pipe burned, just what the weather would be the next day.

As I have said, we were tremendously happy until Andrew got the fatal idea of telling the world how happy we were. I am sorry to have to admit he had always been rather a bookish man. In his college days he had edited the students' magazine, and sometimes he would get discontented with the *Farm and Fireside* serials and pull down his bound volumes of the college paper. He would read me some of his youthful poems and stories and mutter vaguely about writing something himself some day. I was more concerned with sitting hens than with sonnets and I'm bound to say I never took these

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threats very seriously. I should have been more severe.

Then great-uncle Philip died, and his car-load of books came to us. He had been a college professor, and years ago when Andrew was a boy Uncle Philip had been very fond of him—had, in fact, put him through college. We were the only near relatives, and all those books turned up one fine day. That was the beginning of the end, if I had only known it. Andrew had the time of his life building shelves all round our living-room; not content with that he turned the old hen house into a study for himself, put in a stove, and used to sit up there evenings after I had gone to bed. The first thing I knew he called the place Sabine Farm (although it had been known for years as Bog Hollow) because he thought it a literary thing to do. He used to take a book along with him when he drove over to Redfield for supplies; sometimes the wagon would be two hours late coming home, with old Ben loafing along between the shafts and Andrew lost in his book.

I didn't think much of all this, but I'm an easy-going woman and as long as Andrew kept

the farm going I had plenty to do on my own hook. Hot bread and coffee, eggs and preserves for breakfast; soup and hot meat, vegetables, dumplings, gravy, brown bread and white, huckleberry pudding, chocolate cake and buttermilk for dinner; muffins, tea, sausage rolls, blackberries and cream, and doughnuts for supper—that's the kind of menu I had been preparing three times a day for years. I hadn't any time to worry about what wasn't my business.

And then one morning I caught Andrew doing up a big, flat parcel for the postman. He looked so sheepish I just had to ask what it was.

"I've written a book," said Andrew, and he showed me the title page—

# PARADISE REGAINED

BY

ANDREW MCGILL

Even then I wasn't much worried, because of course I knew no one would print it. But Lord! a month or so later came a letter from a publisher—accepting it! That's the letter An-

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drew keeps framed above his desk. Just to show how such things sound I'll copy it here:

DECAMERON, JONES AND COMPANY  
PUBLISHERS  
UNION SQUARE, NEW YORK

January 13, 1907.

DEAR MR. MCGILL:

We have read with singular pleasure your manuscript "Paradise Regained." There is no doubt in our minds that so spirited an account of the joys of sane country living should meet with popular approval, and, with the exception of a few revisions and abbreviations, we would be glad to publish the book practically as it stands. We would like to have it illustrated by Mr. Tortoni, some of whose work you may have seen, and would be glad to know whether he may call upon you in order to acquaint himself with the local colour of your neighbourhood.

We would be glad to pay you a royalty of 10 per cent. upon the retail price of the book, and we enclose duplicate contracts for your signature in case this proves satisfactory to you.

Believe us, etc., etc.,

DECAMERON, JONES & CO.

I have since thought that "Paradise Lost" would have been a better title for that book.

It was published in the autumn of 1907, and since that time our life has never been the same. By some mischance the book became the success of the season; it was widely commended as "a gospel of health and sanity" and Andrew received, in almost every mail, offers from publishers and magazine editors who wanted to get hold of his next book. It is almost incredible to what stratagems publishers will descend to influence an author. Andrew had written in "Paradise Regained" of the tramps who visit us, how quaint and appealing some of them are (let me add, how dirty), and how we never turn away any one who seems worthy. Would you believe that, in the spring after the book was published, a disreputable-looking vagabond with a knapsack, who turned up one day, blarneyed Andrew about his book and stayed overnight, announced himself at breakfast as a leading New York publisher? He had chosen this ruse in order to make Andrew's acquaintance.

You can imagine that it didn't take long for Andrew to become spoiled at this rate! The next year he suddenly disappeared, leaving only

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a note on the kitchen table, and tramped all over the state for six weeks collecting material for a new book. I had all I could do to keep him from going to New York to talk to editors and people of that sort. Envelopes of newspaper cuttings used to come to him, and he would pore over them when he ought to have been ploughing corn. Luckily the mail man comes along about the middle of the morning when Andrew is out in the fields, so I used to look over the letters before he saw them. After the second book ("Happiness and Hayseed" it was called) was printed, letters from publishers got so thick that I used to put them all in the stove before Andrew saw them—except those from the Decameron Jones people, which sometimes held checks. Literary folk used to turn up now and then to interview Andrew, but generally I managed to head them off.

But Andrew got to be less and less of a farmer and more and more of a literary man. He bought a typewriter. He would hang over the pigpen noting down adjectives for the sunset instead of mending the weather vane on the barn which took a slew so that the north wind

came from the southwest. He hardly ever looked at the Sears Roebuck catalogues any more, and after Mr. Decameron came to visit us and suggested that Andrew write a book of country poems, the man became simply unbearable.

And all the time I was counting eggs and turning out three meals a day, and running the farm when Andrew got a literary fit and would go off on some vagabond jaunt to collect adventures for a new book. (I wish you could have seen the state he was in when he came back from these trips, hobbing it along the roads without any money or a clean sock to his back. One time he returned with a cough you could hear the other side of the barn, and I had to nurse him for three weeks.) When somebody wrote a little booklet about "The Sage of Redfield" and described me as a "rural Xantippe" and "the domestic balance-wheel that kept the great writer close to the homely realities of life" I made up my mind to give Andrew some of his own medicine. And that's my story.

## CHAPTER TWO

**I**T WAS a fine, crisp morning in fall—October I dare say—and I was in the kitchen coring apples for apple sauce. We were going to have roast pork for dinner with boiled potatoes and what Andrew calls Vandyke brown gravy. Andrew had driven over to town to get some flour and feed and wouldn't be back till noontime.

Being a Monday, Mrs. McNally, the washerwoman, had come over to take care of the washing. I remember I was just on my way out to the wood pile for a few sticks of birch when I heard wheels turn in at the gate. There was one of the fattest white horses I ever saw, and a queer wagon, shaped like a van. A funny-looking little man with a red beard leaned forward from the seat and said something. I didn't hear what it was. I was looking at that preposterous wagon of his.

## PARNASSUS ON WHEELS 13

It was coloured a pale, robin's-egg blue, and on the side, in big scarlet letters, was painted:

R. MIFFLIN'S  
TRAVELLING PARNASSUS  
GOOD BOOKS FOR SALE  
SHAKESPEARE, CHARLES LAMB, R. L. S.  
HAZLITT, AND ALL OTHERS

Underneath the wagon, in slings, hung what looked like a tent, together with a lantern, a bucket, and other small things. The van had a raised skylight on the roof, something like an old-fashioned trolley car; and from one corner went up a stove pipe. At the back was a door with little windows on each side and a flight of steps leading up to it.

As I stood looking at this queer turnout, the little reddish man climbed down from in front and stood watching me. His face was a comic mixture of pleasant drollery and a sort of weather-beaten cynicism. He had a neat little russet beard and a shabby Norfolk jacket. His head was very bald.

"Is this where Andrew McGill lives?" he said.

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I admitted it.

"But he's away until noon," I added. "He'll be back then. There's roast pork for dinner."

"And apple sauce?" said the little man.

"Apple sauce and brown gravy," I said. "That's why I'm sure he'll be home on time. Sometimes he's late when there's boiled dinner, but never on roast pork days. Andrew would never do for a rabbi."

A sudden suspicion struck me.

"You're not another publisher, are you?" I cried. "What do you want with Andrew?"

"I was wondering whether he wouldn't buy this outfit," said the little man, including, with a wave of the hand, both van and white horse. As he spoke he released a hook somewhere, and raised the whole side of his wagon like a flap. Some kind of catch clicked, the flap remained up like a roof, displaying nothing but books—rows and rows of them. The flank of his van was nothing but a big bookcase. Shelves stood above shelves, all of them full of books—both old and new. As I stood gazing, he pulled out a printed card from somewhere and gave it to me:

ROGER MIFFLIN'S  
TRAVELLING PARNASSUS

Worthy friends, my wain doth hold  
Many a book, both new and old;  
Books, the truest friends of man,  
Fill this rolling caravan.  
Books to satisfy all uses,  
Golden lyrics of the Muses,  
Books on cookery and farming,  
Novels passionate and charming,  
Every kind for every need  
So that he who buys may read.  
What librarian can surpass us?

MIFFLIN'S TRAVELLING  
PARNASSUS

By R. Mifflin, Prop'r.

Star Job Print, Celeryville, Va.

While I was chuckling over this, he had raised a similar flap on the other side of the Parnassus which revealed still more shelves loaded with books.

I'm afraid I am severely practical by nature.

"Well!" I said, "I should think you *would* need a pretty stout steed to lug that load along. It must weigh more than a coal wagon."

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‘Oh, Peg can manage it all right,’ he said. ‘We don’t travel very fast. But look here, I want to sell out. Do you suppose your husband would buy the outfit—Parnassus, Pegasus, and all? He’s fond of books, isn’t he?’

“Hold on a minute!” I said. “Andrew’s my brother, not my husband, and he’s altogether *too* fond of books. Books’ll be the ruin of this farm pretty soon. He’s mooning about over his books like a sitting hen about half the time, when he ought to be mending harness. Lord, if he saw this wagonload of yours he’d be unsettled for a week. I have to stop the postman down the road and take all the publishers’ catalogues out of the mail so that Andrew don’t see ’em. I’m mighty glad he’s not here just now, I can tell you!”

I’m not literary, as I said before, but I’m human enough to like a good book, and my eye was running along those shelves of his as I spoke. He certainly had a pretty miscellaneous collection. I noticed poetry, essays, novels, cook books, juveniles, school books, Bibles, and what not—all jumbled together.

“Well, see here,” said the little man—and

about this time I noticed that he had the bright eyes of a fanatic — "I've been cruising with this Parnassus going on seven years. I've covered the territory from Florida to Maine and I reckon I've injected about as much good literature into the countryside as ever old Doc Eliot did with his five-foot shelf. I want to sell out now. I'm going to write a book about 'Literature Among the Farmers,' and want to settle down with my brother in Brooklyn and write it. I've got a sackful of notes for it. I guess I'll just stick around until Mr. McGill gets home and see if he won't buy me out. I'll sell the whole concern, horse, wagon, and books, for \$400. I've read Andrew McGill's stuff and I reckon the proposition'll interest him. I've had more fun with this Parnassus than a barrel of monkeys. I used to be a school teacher till my health broke down. Then I took this up and I've made more than expenses and had the time of my life."

"Well, Mr. Mifflin," I said, "if you want to stay around I guess I can't stop you. But I'm sorry you and your old Parnassus ever came this way."

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I turned on my heel and went back to the kitchen. I knew pretty well that Andrew would go up in the air when he saw that wagon-load of books and one of those crazy cards with Mr. Mifflin's poetry on it.

I must confess that I was considerably upset. Andrew is just as unpractical and fanciful as a young girl, and always dreaming of new adventures and rambles around the country. If he ever saw that travelling Parnassus he'd fall for it like snap. And I knew Mr. Decameron was after him for a new book anyway. (I'd intercepted one of his letters suggesting another "Happiness and Hayseed" trip just a few weeks before. Andrew was away when the letter came. I had a suspicion what was in it; so I opened it, read it, and—well, burnt it. Heavens! as though Andrew didn't have enough to do without mooning down the road like a tinker, just to write a book about it.)

As I worked around the kitchen I could see Mr. Mifflin making himself at home. He unhitched his horse, tied her up to the fence, sat down by the wood pile, and lit a pipe. I could see I was in for it. By and by I couldn't stand

it any longer. I went out to talk to that bald-headed pedlar.

"See here," I said. "You're a pretty cool fish to make yourself so easy in my yard. I tell you I don't want you around here, you and your travelling parcheesi. Suppose you clear out of here before my brother gets back and don't be breaking up our happy family."

"Miss McGill," he said (the man had a pleasant way with him, too—darn him—with his bright, twinkling eye and his silly little beard), "I'm sure I don't want to be discourteous. If you move me on from here, of course I'll go; but I warn you I shall lie in wait for Mr. McGill just down this road. I'm here to sell this caravan of culture, and by the bones of Swinburne I think your brother's the man to buy it."

My blood was up now, and I'll admit that I said my next without proper calculation.

"Rather than have Andrew buy your old parcheesi," I said, "I'll buy it myself. I'll give you \$300 for it."

The little man's face brightened. He didn't either accept or decline my offer. (I was frightened to death that he'd take me right on

the nail and bang would go my three years' savings for a Ford.)

"Come and have another look at her," he said.

I must admit that Mr. Roger Mifflin had fixed up his van mighty comfortably inside. The body of the wagon was built out on each side over the wheels, which gave it an unwieldy appearance but made extra room for the bookshelves. This left an inside space about five feet wide and nine long. On one side he had a little oil stove, a flap table, and a cozy-looking bunk above which was built a kind of chest of drawers—to hold clothes and such things, I suppose; on the other side more bookshelves, a small table, and a little wicker easy chair. Every possible inch of space seemed to be made useful in some way, for a shelf or a hook or a hanging cupboard or something. Above the stove was a neat little row of pots and dishes and cooking usefals. The raised skylight made it just possible to stand upright in the centre aisle of the van; and a little sliding window opened on to the driver's seat in front. Altogether it was a very neat affair. The windows in front and back were curtained and a pot of geraniums

stood on a diminutive shelf. I was amused to see a sandy Irish terrier curled up on a bright Mexican blanket in the bunk.

"Miss McGill," he said, "I couldn't sell Parnassus for less than four hundred. I've put twice that much into her, one time and another. She's built clean and solid all through, and there's everything a man would need from blankets to bouillon cubes. The whole thing's yours for \$400 -including dog, cook stove, and everything -jib, boom, and spanker. There's a tent in a sling underneath, and an ice box (he pulled up a little trap door under the bunk) and a tank of coal oil and Lord knows what all. She's as good as a yacht; but I'm tired of her. If you're so afraid of your brother taking a fancy to her, why don't you buy her yourself and go off on a lark? Make *him* stay home and mind the farm! . . . Tell you what I'll do. I'll start you on the road myself, come with you the first day and show you how it's worked. You could have the time of your life in this thing, and give yourself a fine vacation. It would give your brother a good surprise, too. Why not?"

I don't know whether it was the neatness of

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his absurd little van, or the madness of the whole proposition, or just the desire to have an adventure of my own and play a trick on Andrew, but anyway, some extraordinary impulse seized me and I roared with laughter.

“Right!” I said. “I’ll do it.”

I, Helen McGill, in the thirty-ninth year of my age!

## CHAPTER THREE

WELL," I thought, "if I'm in for an adventure I may as well be spry about it. Andrew'll be home by half-past twelve and if I'm going to give him the slip I'd better get a start. I suppose he'll think I'm crazy! He'll follow me, I guess. Well, he just shan't catch me, that's all!" A kind of anger came over me to think that I'd been living on that farm for nearly fifteen years—yes, sir, ever since I was twenty-five—and hardly ever been away except for that trip to Boston once a year to go shopping with cousin Edie. I'm a home-keeping soul, I guess, and I love my kitchen and my preserve cupboard and my linen closet as well as grandmother ever did, but something in that blue October air and that crazy little red-bearded man just tickled me.

"Look here, Mr. Parnassus," I said, "I guess I'm a fat old fool but I just believe I'll do that.

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You hitch up your horse and van and I'll go pack some clothes and write you a check. It'll do Andrew all the good in the world to have me skip. I'll get a chance to read a few books, too. It'll be as good as going to college!" And I untied my apron and ran for the house. The little man stood leaning against a corner of the van as if he were stupefied. I dare say he was.

I ran into the house through the front door, and it struck me as comical to see a copy of one of Andrew's magazines lying on the living-room table with "The Revolt of Womanhood" printed across it in red letters. "Here goes for the revolt of Helen McGill," I thought. I sat down at Andrew's desk, pushed aside a pad of notes he had been jotting down about "the magic of autumn," and scrawled a few lines:

DEAR ANDREW,

Don't be thinking I'm crazy. I've gone off for an adventure. It just came over me that you've had all the adventures while I've been at home baking bread. Mrs. McNally will look after your meals and one of her girls can come over to do the housework. So don't worry. I'm going off for a little while—a month, maybe—to see some of this happiness and

hayseed of yours. It's what the magazines call the revolt of womanhood. Warm underwear in the cedar chest in the spare room when you need it.

With love,

HELEN.

I left the note on his desk.

Mrs. McNally was bending over the tubs in the laundry. I could see only the broad arch of her back and hear the vigorous zzzzzzzz of her rubbing. She straightened up at my call.

"Mrs. McNally," I said, "I'm going away for a little trip. You'd better let the washing go until this afternoon and get Andrew's dinner for him. He'll be back about twelve-thirty. It's half-past ten now. You tell him I've gone over to see Mrs. Collins at Locust Farm."

Mrs. McNally is a brawny, slow-witted Swede. "All right Mis' McGill," she said. "You be back to denner?"

"No, I'm not coming back for a month," I said. "I'm going away for a trip. I want you to send Rosie over here every day to do the housework while I'm away. You can arrange with Mr. McGill about that. I've got to hurry now."

Mrs. McNally's honest eyes, as blue as Copenhagen china, gazing through the window in perplexity, fell upon the travelling Parnassus and Mr. Mifflin backing Pegasus into the shafts. I saw her make a valiant effort to comprehend the sign painted on the side of the van—and give it up.

“You going driving?” she said blankly.

“Yes,” I said, and fled upstairs.

I always keep my bank book in an old Huyler box in the top drawer of my bureau. I don't save very quickly, I'm afraid. I have a little income from some money father left me, but Andrew takes care of that. Andrew pays all the farm expenses, but the housekeeping accounts fall to me. I make a fairish amount of pin money on my poultry and some of my preserves that I send to Boston, and on some recipes of mine that I send to a woman's magazine now and then; but generally my savings don't amount to much over \$10 a month. In the last five years I had put by something more than \$600. I had been saving up for a Ford. But just now it looked to me as if that Parnassus would be more

fun than a Ford ever could be. Four hundred dollars was a lot of money, but I thought of what it would mean to have Andrew come home and buy it. Why, he'd be away until Thanksgiving! Whereas if I bought it I could take it away, have my adventure, and sell it somewhere so that Andrew never need see it. I hardened my heart and determined to give the Sage of Redfield some of his own medicine.

My balance at the Redfield National Bank was \$615.20. I sat down at the table in my bedroom where I keep my accounts and wrote out a check to Roger Mifflin for \$400. I put in plenty of curlicues after the figures so that no one could raise the check into \$400,000; then I got out my old rattan suit case and put in some clothes. The whole business didn't take me ten minutes. I came downstairs to find Mrs. McNally looking sourly at the Parnassus from the kitchen door.

"You going away in that—that 'bus, Mis' McGill?" she asked.

"Yes, Mrs. McNally," I said cheerfully. Her use of the word gave me an inspiration. "That's one of the new jitney 'buses we hear about. He's going to take me to the station. Don't you

worry about me. I'm going for a holiday. You get Mr. McGill's dinner ready for him. After dinner tell him there's a note for him in the living-room."

"I tank that bane a queer 'bus," said Mrs. McNally, puzzled. I think the excellent woman suspected an elopement.

I carried my suit case out to the Parnassus. Pegasus stood placidly between the shafts. From within came sounds of vigorous movement. In a moment the little man burst out with a bulging portmanteau in his hand. He had a tweed cap slanted on the back of his head.

"There!" he cried triumphantly. "I've packed all my personal effects—clothes and so on—and everything else goes with the transaction. When I get on the train with this bag I'm a free man, and hurrah for Brooklyn! Lord, won't I be glad to get back to the city! I lived in Brooklyn once, and I haven't been back there for ten years," he added plaintively.

"Here's the check," I said, handing it to him. He flushed a little, and looked at me rather shamefacedly. "See here," he said, "I hope you're not making a bad bargain? I don't want

to take advantage of a lady. If you think your brother. . . .”

“I was going to buy a Ford, anyway,” I said, “and it looks to me as though this parcheesi of yours would be cheaper to run than any flivver that ever came out of Detroit. I want to keep it away from Andrew and that’s the main thing. You give me a receipt and we’ll get away from here before he comes back.”

He took the check without a word, hoisted his fat portmanteau on the driver’s seat, and then disappeared in the van. In a minute he reappeared. On the back of one of his poetical cards he had written:

Received from Miss McGill the sum of four hundred dollars in exchange for one Travelling Parnassus in first class condition, delivered to her this day, October 3rd, 19——. Signed

ROGER MIFFLIN.

“Tell me,” I said, “does your Parnassus—*my* Parnassus, rather—contain everything I’m likely to need? Is it stocked up with food and so on?”

“I was coming to that,” he said. “You’d

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find a fair supply of stuff in the cupboard over the stove, though I used to get most of my meals at farmhouses along the road. I generally read aloud to people as I go along, and they're often good for a free meal. It's amazing how little most of the country folk know about books, and how pleased they are to hear good stuff. Down in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. . . ."

"Well, how about the horse?" I said hastily, seeing him about to embark on an anecdote. It wasn't far short of eleven o'clock, and I was anxious to get started.

"It might be well to take along some oats. My supply's about exhausted."

I filled a sack with oats in the stable and Mr. Mifflin showed me where to hang it under the van. Then in the kitchen I loaded a big basket with provisions for an emergency: a dozen eggs, a jar of sliced bacon, butter, cheese, condensed milk, tea, biscuits, jam, and two loaves of bread. These Mr. Mifflin stowed inside the van, Mrs. McNally watching in amazement.

"I tank this bane a queer picnic!" she said. "Which way you going? Mr. McGill, is he coming after you?"

“No,” I insisted, “he’s not coming. I’m going off on a holiday. You get dinner for him and he won’t worry about anything until after that. Tell him I’ve gone over to see Mrs. Collins.”

I climbed the little steps and entered my Parnassus with a pleasant thrill of ownership. The terrier on the bunk jumped to the floor with a friendly wag of the tail. I piled the bunk with bedding and blankets of my own, shook out the drawers which fitted above the bunk, and put into them what few belongings I was taking with me. And we were ready to start.

Redbeard was already sitting in front with the reins in hand. I climbed up beside him. The front seat was broad but uncushioned, well sheltered by the peak of the van. I gave a quick glance around at the comfortable house under its elms and maples—saw the big, red barn shining in the sun and the pump under the grape arbour. I waved good-bye to Mrs. McNally who was watching us in silent amazement. Pegasus threw her solid weight against the traces and Parnassus swung round and rolled past the gate. We turned into the Redfield road.

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"Here," said Miffin, holding me the reins, "you're skipper, you'd better drive. Which way do you want to go?"

My breath came a little fast when I realized that my adventure had begun!

## CHAPTER FOUR

**J**UST out of sight of the farm the road forks, one way running on to Walton where you cross the river by a covered bridge, the other swinging down toward Greenbriar and Port Vigor. Mrs. Collins lives a mile or so up the Walton road, and as I very often run over to see her I thought Andrew would be most likely to look for me there. So, after we had passed through the grove, I took the right-hand turn to Greenbriar. We began the long ascent over Huckleberry Hill and as I smelt the fresh autumn odour of the leaves I chuckled a little.

Mr. Mifflin seemed in a perfect ecstasy of high spirits. "This is certainly grand," he said. "Lord, I applaud your spunk. Do you think Mr. McGill will give chase?"

"I haven't an idea," I said. "Not right away, anyhow. He's so used to my settled ways that I don't think he'll suspect anything till he finds

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my note. I wonder what kind of a story Mrs. McNally will tell!"

"How about putting him off the scent?" he said. "Give me your handkerchief."

I did so. He hopped nimbly out, ran back down the hill (he was a spry little person in spite of his bald crown), and dropped the handkerchief on the Walton Road about a hundred feet beyond the fork. Then he followed me up the slope.

"There," he said, grinning like a kid, "that'll fool him. The Sage of Redfield will undoubtedly follow a false spoor and the criminals will win a good start. But I'm afraid it's rather easy to follow a craft as unusual as Parnassus."

"Tell me how you manage the thing," I said. "Do you really make it pay?" We halted at the top of the hill to give Pegasus a breathing space. The terrier lay down in the dust and watched us gravely. Mr. Miffin pulled out a pipe and begged my permission to smoke.

"It's rather comical how I first got into it," he said. "I was a school teacher down in Maryland. I'd been plugging away in a country school for years, on a starvation salary. I was

trying to support an invalid mother, and put by something in case of storms. I remember how I used to wonder whether I'd ever be able to wear a suit that wasn't shabby and have my shoes polished every day. Then my health went back on me. The doctor told me to get into the open air. By and by I got this idea of a travelling bookstore. I had always been a lover of books, and in the days when I boarded out among the farmers I used to read aloud to them. After my mother died I built the wagon to suit my own ideas, bought a stock of books from a big second-hand store in Baltimore, and set out. Parnassus just about saved my life I guess."

He pushed his faded old cap back on his head and relit his pipe. I clicked to Pegasus and we rumbled gently off over the upland, looking down across the pastures. Distant cow bells sounded tankle-tonk among the bushes. Across the slope of the hill I could see the road winding away to Redfield. Somewhere along that road Andrew would be rolling back toward home and roast pork with apple sauce; and here was I, setting out on the first madness of my life without even a qualm.

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"Miss McGill," said the little man, "this rolling pavilion has been wife, doctor, and religion to me for seven years. A month ago I would have scoffed at the thought of leaving her; but somehow it's come over me I need a change. There's a book I've been yearning to write for a long time, and I need a desk steady under my elbows and a roof over my head. And silly as it seems, I'm crazy to get back to Brooklyn. My brother and I used to live there as kids. Think of walking over the old Bridge at sunset and seeing the towers of Manhattan against a red sky! And those old gray cruisers down in the Navy Yard! You don't know how tickled I am to sell out. I've sold a lot of copies of your brother's books and I've often thought he'd be the man to buy Parnassus if I got tired of her."

"So he would," I said. "Just the man. He'd be only too likely to —and go maundering about in this jaunting car and neglect the farm. But tell me about selling books. How much profit do you make out of it? We'll be passing Mrs. Mason's farm, by and by, and we might as well sell her something just to make a start."

"It's very simple," he said. "I replenish my

stock whenever I go through a big town. There's always a second-hand bookstore somewhere about, where you can pick up odds and ends. And every now and then I write to a wholesaler in New York for some stuff. When I buy a book I mark in the back just what I paid for it, then I know what I can afford to sell it for. See here."

He pulled up a book from behind the seat—a copy of "Lorna Doone" it was—and showed me the letters *a m* scrawled in pencil in the back.

"That means that I paid ten cents for this. Now, if you sell it for a quarter you've got a safe profit. It costs me about four dollars a week to run Parnassus—generally less. If you clear that much in six days you can afford to lay off on Sundays!"

"How do you know that *a m* stands for ten cents?" I asked.

"The code word's *manuscript*. Each letter stands for a figure, from 0 up to 9, see?" He scrawled it down on a scrap of paper:

*m a n u s c r i p t*  
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

"Now, you see *a m* stands for 10, *a n* would be 12, *n s* is 24, *a c* is 15, *a m m* is \$1.00, and so on. I don't pay much over fifty cents for books as a rule, because country folks are shy of paying much for them. They'll pay a lot for a separator or a buggy top, but they've never been taught to worry about literature! But it's surprising how excited they get about books if you sell 'em the right kind. Over beyond Port Vigor there's a farmer who's waiting for me to go back -I've been there three or four times—and he'll buy about five dollars' worth if I know him. First time I went there I sold him 'Treasure Island,' and he's talking about it yet. I sold him 'Robinson Crusoe,' and 'Little Women' for his daughter, and 'Huck Finn,' and Grubb's book about 'The Potato.' Last time I was there he wanted some Shakespeare, but I wouldn't give it to him. I didn't think he was up to it yet."

I began to see something of the little man's idealism in his work. He was a kind of traveling missionary in his way. A hefty talker, too. His eyes were twinkling now and I could see him warming up.

“Lord!” he said, “when you sell a man a book you don’t sell him just twelve ounces of paper and ink and glue—you sell him a whole new life. Love and friendship and humour and ships at sea by night—there’s all heaven and earth in a book, a real book I mean. Jiminy! If I were the baker or the butcher or the broom huckster, people would run to the gate when I came by—just waiting for my stuff. And here I go loaded with everlasting salvation—yes, ma’am, salvation for their little, stunted minds—and it’s hard to make ’em see it. That’s what makes it worth while—I’m doing something that nobody else from Nazareth, Maine, to Walla Walla, Washington, has ever thought of. It’s a new field, but by the bones of Whitman it’s worth while. That’s what this country needs—more books!”

He laughed at his own vehemence. “Do you know, it’s comical,” he said. “Even the publishers, the fellows that print the books, can’t see what I’m doing for them. Some of ’em refuse me credit because I sell their books for what they’re worth instead of for the prices they mark on them. They write me letters about price-maintenance—and I write back about merit-

maintenance. Publish a good book and I'll get a good price for it, say I! Sometimes I think the publishers know less about books than any one else! I guess that's natural, though. Most school teachers don't know much about children."

"The best of it is," he went on, "I have such a darn good time. Peg and Bock (that's the dog) and I go loading along the road on a warm summer day, and by and by we'll fetch up alongside some boarding-house and there are the boarders all rocking off their lunch on the veranda. Most of 'em bored to death—nothing good to read, nothing to do but sit and watch the flies buzzing in the sun and the chickens rubbing up and down in the dust. First thing you know I'll sell half a dozen books that put the love of life into them, and they don't forget Parnassus in a hurry. Take O. Henry, for instance—there isn't anybody so dog-gone sleepy that he won't enjoy that man's stories. He understood life, you bet, and he could write it down with all its little twists. I've spent an evening reading O. Henry and Wilkie Collins to people and had them buy out all their books I had and clamour for more."

“What do you do in winter?” I asked—a practical question, as most of mine are.

“That depends on where I am when bad weather sets in,” said Mr. Mifflin. “Two winters I was down south and managed to keep Parnassus going all through the season. Otherwise, I just lay up wherever I am. I’ve never found it hard to get lodging for Peg and a job for myself, if I had to have them. Last winter I worked in a bookstore in Boston. Winter before, I was in a country drugstore down in Pennsylvania. Winter before that, I tutored a couple of small boys in English literature. Winter before that, I was a steward on a steamer; you see how it goes. I’ve had a fairly miscellaneous experience. As far as I can see, a man who’s fond of books never need starve! But this winter I’m planning to live with my brother in Brooklyn and slog away at my book. Lord, how I’ve pondered over that thing! Long summer afternoons I’ve sat here, jogging along in the dust, thinking it out until it seemed as if my forehead would burst. You see, my idea is that the common people—in the country, that is—never have had any chance to get hold of books.

and never have had any one to explain what books can mean. It's all right for college presidents to draw up their five-foot shelves of great literature, and for the publishers to advertise sets of their Linoleum Classics, but what the people need is the good, homely, honest stuff—something that'll stick to their ribs—make them laugh and tremble and feel sick to think of the littleness of this popcorn ball spinning in space without ever even getting a hot-box! And something that'll spur 'em on to keep the hearth well swept and the wood pile split into kindling and the dishes washed and dried and put away. Any one who can get the country people to read something worth while is doing his nation a real service. And that's what this caravan of culture aspires to. . . . You must be weary of this harangue! Does the Sage of Redfield ever run on like that?"

"Not to me," I said. "He's known me so long that he thinks of me as a kind of animated bread-baking and cake-mixing machine. I guess he doesn't put much stock in my judgment in literary matters. But he puts his digestion in my hands without reserve. There's Mason's

farm over there. I guess we'd better sell them some books—hadn't we? Just for a starter."

We turned into the lane that runs up to the Mason farmhouse. Bock trotted on ahead—very stiff on his legs and his tail gently wagging—to interview the mastiff, and Mrs. Mason who was sitting on the porch, peeling potatoes, laid down the pan. She's a big, buxom woman with jolly, brown eyes like a cow's.

"For heaven's sake, Miss McGill," she called out in a cheerful voice—"I'm glad to see you. Got a lift, did you?"

She hadn't really noticed the inscription on Parnassus, and thought it was a regular huckster's wagon.

"Well, Mrs. Mason," I said, "I've gone into the book business. This is Mr. Mifflin. I've bought out his stock. We've come to sell you some books."

She laughed. "Go on, Helen," she said, "you can't kid me! I bought a whole set of books last year from an agent—'The World's Great Funeral Orations'—twenty volumes. Sam and I ain't read more'n the first volume yet. It's awful uneasy reading!"

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Miffin jumped down, and raised the side flap of the wagon. Mrs. Mason came closer. I was tickled to see how the little man perked up at the sight of a customer. Evidently selling books was meat and drink to him.

“Madam,” he said, “‘Funeral Orations’ (bound in sackcloth, I suppose?) have their place, but Miss McGill and I have got some real books here to which I invite your attention. Winter will be here soon, and you will need something more cheerful to beguile your evenings. Very possibly you have growing children who would profit by a good book or two. A book of fairy tales for the little girl I see on the porch? Or stories of inventors for that boy who is about to break his neck jumping from the barn loft? Or a book about road making for your husband? Surely there is something here you need? Miss McGill probably knows your tastes.”

That little red-bearded man was surely a born salesman. How he guessed that Mr. Mason was the road commissioner in our township, goodness only knows. Perhaps it was just a lucky shot. By this time most of the family had gathered around the van, and I saw Mr. Mason com-

ing from the barn with his twelve-year-old Billy.

"Sam," shouted Mrs. Mason, "here's Miss McGill turned book pedlar and got a preacher with her!"

"Hello, Miss McGill," said Mr. Mason. He is a big, slow-moving man of great gravity and solidity. "Where's Andrew?"

"Andrew's coming home for roast pork and apple sauce," I said, "and I'm going off to sell books for a living. Mr. Mifflin here is teaching me how. We've got a book on road mending that's just what you need."

I saw Mr. and Mrs. Mason exchange glances. Evidently they thought me crazy. I began to wonder whether we had made a mistake in calling on people I knew so well. The situation was a trifle embarrassing.

Mr. Mifflin came to the rescue.

"Don't be alarmed, sir," he said to Mr. Mason. "I haven't kidnapped Miss McGill." (As he is about half my size this was amusing.) "We are trying to increase her brother's income by selling his books for him. As a matter of fact, we have a wager with him that we can sell fifty

copies of 'Happiness and Hayseed' before Hallowe'en. Now I'm sure your sporting instinct will assist us by taking at least one copy. Andrew McGill is probably the greatest author in this State, and every taxpayer ought to possess his books. May I show you a copy?"

"That sounds reasonable," said Mr. Mason, and he almost smiled. "What do you say, Emma, think we better buy a book or two? You know those 'Funeral Orations.' . . ."

"Well," said Emma, "you know we've always said we ought to read one of Andrew McGill's books but we didn't rightly know how to get hold of one. That fellow that sold us the funeral speeches didn't seem to know about 'em. I tell you what, you folks better stop and have dinner with us and you can tell us what we'd ought to buy. I'm just ready to put the potatoes on the stove now."

I must confess that the prospect of sitting down to a meal I hadn't cooked myself appealed to me strongly; and I was keen to see what kind of grub Mrs. Mason provided for her household; but I was afraid that if we dallied there too long Andrew would be after us. I was about to

say that we would have to be getting on, and couldn't stay; but apparently the zest of expounding his philosophy to new listeners was too much for Miffin. I heard him saying:

"That's mighty kind of you, Mrs. Mason, and we'd like very much to stay. Perhaps I can put Peg up in your barn for a while. Then we can tell you all about our books." And to my amazement I found myself chiming in with assent.

Miffin certainly surpassed himself at dinner. The fact that Mrs. Mason's hot biscuits tasted of saleratus gave me far less satisfaction than it otherwise would, because I was absorbed in listening to the little vagabond's talk. Mr. Mason came to the table grumbling something about his telephone being out of order—(I wondered whether he had been trying to get Andrew on the wire; he was a little afraid that I was being run away with, I think)—but he was soon won over by the current of the little man's cheery wit. Nothing daunted Miffin. He talked to the old grandmother about quilts; offered to cut off a strip of his necktie for her new patchwork; and told all about the illustrated book on

quilts that he had in the van. He discussed cookery and the Bible with Mrs. Mason; and she being a leading light in the Greenbriar Sunday School, was pleasantly scandalized by his account of the best detective stories in the Old Testament. With Mr. Mason he was all scientific farming, chemical manures, macadam roads, and crop rotation; and to little Billy (who sat next him) he told extraordinary yarns about Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, Kit Carson, Buffalo Bill, and what not. Honestly I was amazed at the little man. He was as genial as a cricket on the hearth, and yet every now and then his earnestness would break through. I don't wonder he was a success at selling books. That man could sell clothes pins or Paris garters, I guess, and make them seem romantic.

"You know, Mr. Mason," he said, "you certainly owe it to these youngsters of yours to put a few really good books into their hands. City kids have the libraries to go to, but in the country there's only old Doc Hostetter's Almanac and the letters written by ladies with backache telling how Peruna did for them.

Give this boy and girl of yours a few good books and you're starting them on the double-track, 'block-signal' line to happiness. Now there's 'Little Women'—that girl of yours can learn more about real girlhood and fine womanhood out of that book than from a year's paper dolls in the attic."

"That's right, Pa," assented Mrs. Mason. "Go on with your meal, Professor, the meat'll be cold.") She was completely won by the travelling bookseller, and had given him the highest title of honour in her ken. "Why, I read that story when I was a girl, and I still remember it. That's better readin' for Dorothy than those funeral speeches, I reckon. I believe the Professor's right: we'd ought to have more books laying around. Seems kind of a shame, with a famous author at the next farm, not to read more, don't it, now?"

So by the time we got down to Mrs. Mason's squash pie (good pie, too, I admit, but her hand is a little heavy for pastry), the whole household was enthusiastic about books, and the atmosphere was literary enough for even Dr. Eliot to live in without panting. Mrs. Mason opened

up her parlour and we sat there while Mifflin recited "The Revenge" and "Maud Muller."

"Well, now, ain't that real sweet!" said Emma Mason. "It's surprising how those words rhyme so nicely. Seems almost as though it was done a-purpose! Reminds me of piece day at school. There was a mighty pretty piece I learned called the 'Wreck of the Asperus.'" And she subsided into a genteel melancholy.

I saw that Mr. Mifflin was well astride his hobby: he had started to tell the children about Robin Hood, but I had the sense to give him a wink. We had to be getting along or surely Andrew might be on us. So while Mifflin was putting Pegasus into the shafts again I picked out seven or eight books that I thought would fit the needs of the Masons. Mr. Mason insisted that "Happiness and Hayseed" be included among them, and gave me a crisp five-dollar bill, refusing any change. "No, no," he said, "I've had more fun than I get at a grange meeting. Come round again, Miss McGill; I'm going to tell Andrew what a good show this travelling theayter of yours gives! And you, Professor, any time you're here about road-

mending season, stop in an' tell me some more good advice. Well, I must get back to the field."

Bock fell in under the van, and we creaked off down the lane. Miffin filled his pipe and was chuckling to himself. I was a little worried now for fear Andrew might overtake us.

"It's a wonder Sam Mason didn't call up Andrew," I said. "It must have looked mighty queer to him for an old farm hand like me to be around, peddling books."

"He would have done it straight off," said Miffin, "but you see, I cut his telephone wire!"

## CHAPTER FIVE

I GAZED in astonishment at the wizened little rogue. Here was a new side to the amiable idealist! Apparently there was a streak of fearless deviltry in him besides his gentle love of books. I'm bound to say that now, for the first time, I really admired him. I had burnt my own very respectable boats behind me, and I rather enjoyed knowing that he, too, could act briskly in a pinch.

"Well!" I said. "You are a cool hand! It's a good job for you that you didn't stay a school-master. You might have taught your pupils some fine deviltries! And at your age, too!"

I'm afraid my raillery goes a little too far sometimes. He flushed a bit at my reference to his age, and puffed sharply at his pipe.

"I say," he rejoined, "how old do you think I am, anyway? Only forty-one, by the bones of Byron! Henry VIII was only forty-one when he

married Anne Boleyn. There are many consolations in history for people over forty! Remember that when you get there."

"Shakespeare wrote 'King Lear' at forty-one," he added, more humorously; and then burst out laughing. "I'd like to edit a series of 'Chloroform Classics,' to include only books written after forty. Who was that doctor man who recommended anaesthetics for us at that age? Now isn't that just like a medico? Nurse us through the diseases of childhood, and as soon as we settle down into permanent good health and worldly wisdom, and freedom from doctors' fees, why he loses interest in us! Jove! I must note that down and bring it into my book."

He pulled out a memorandum book and jotted down "Chloroform Classics" in a small, neat hand.

"Well," I said (I felt a little contrite, as I was sincerely sorry to have offended him), "I've passed forty myself in some measurements, so youth no longer has any terrors for me."

He looked at me rather comically.

"My dear madam," he said, "your age is

precisely eighteen. I think that if we escape the clutches of the Sage of Redfield you may really begin to live."

"Oh, Andrew's not a bad sort," I said. "He's absent-minded, and hot tempered, and a little selfish. The publishers have done their best to spoil him, but for a literary man I guess he's quite human. He rescued me from being a governess, and that's to his credit. If only he didn't take his meals quite so much as a matter of course. . . ."

"The preposterous thing about him is that he really can *write*," said Mifflin. "I envy him that. Don't let him know I said so, but as a matter of fact his prose is almost as good as Thoreau. He approaches facts as daintily as a cat crossing a wet road."

"You should see him at dinner," I thought; or rather I meant to think it, but the words slipped out. I found myself thinking aloud in a rather disconcerting way while sitting with this strange little person.

He looked at me. I noticed for the first time that his eyes were slate blue, with funny birds' foot wrinkles at the corners.

"That's so," he said. "I never thought of that. A fine prose style certainly presupposes sound nourishment. Excellent point that . . . And yet Thoreau did his own cooking. A sort of Boy Scout I guess, with a badge as kitchen master. Perhaps he took Beechnut bacon with him into the woods. I wonder who cooked for Stevenson—Cummy? The 'Child's Garden of Verses' was really a kind of kitchen garden, wasn't it? I'm afraid the commissariat problem has weighed rather heavily on you. I'm glad you've got away from it."

All this was getting rather intricate for me. I set it down as I remember it, inaccurately perhaps. My governess days are pretty far astern now, and my line is common sense rather than literary allusions. I said something of the sort.

"Common sense?" he repeated. "Good Lord, ma'am, sense is the most uncommon thing in the world. I haven't got it. I don't believe your brother has, from what you say. Bock here has it. See how he trots along the road, keeps an eye on the scenery, and minds his own business. I never saw him get into a fight yet. Wish I could say the same of myself. I named

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him after Boccaccio, to remind me to read the 'Decameron' some day."

"Judging by the way you talk," I said, "you ought to be quite a writer yourself."

"Talkers never write. They go on talking."

There was a considerable silence. Mifflin relit his pipe and watched the landscape with a shrewd eye. I held the reins loosely, and Peg ambled along with a steady clop-clop. Parnassus creaked musically, and the mid-afternoon sun lay rich across the road. We passed another farm, but I did not suggest stopping as I felt we ought to push on. Mifflin seemed lost in meditation, and I began to wonder, a little uneasily, how the adventure would turn out. This quaintly masterful little man was a trifle disconcerting. Across the next ridge I could see the Greenbriar church spire shining white.

"Do you know this part of the country?" I asked finally.

"Not this exact section. I've been in Port Vigor often, but then I was on the road that runs along the Sound. I suppose this village ahead is Greenbriar?"

"Yes," I said. "It's about thirteen miles from

there to Port Vigor. How do you expect to get back to Brooklyn?"

"Oh, Brooklyn?" he said vaguely. "Yes, I'd forgotten about Brooklyn for the minute. I was thinking of my book. Why, I guess I'll take the train from Port Vigor. The trouble is, you can never get to Brooklyn without going through New York. It's symbolic, I suppose."

Again there was a silence. Finally he said, "Is there another town between Greenbriar and Port Vigor?"

"Yes, Shelby," I said. "About five miles from Greenbriar."

"That'll be as far as you'll get to-night," he said. "I'll see you safe to Shelby, and then make tracks for Port Vigor. I hope there's a decent inn at Shelby where you can stop overnight."

I hoped so, too, but I wasn't going to let him see that with the waning afternoon my enthusiasm was a little less robust. I was wondering what Andrew was thinking, and whether Mrs. McNally had left things in good order. Like most Swedes she had to be watched or she left her work only three quarters done. And I

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didn't depend any too much on her daughter Rosie to do the housework efficiently. I wondered what kind of meals Andrew would get. And probably he would go right on wearing his summer underclothes, although I had already reminded him about changing. Then there were the chickens . . .

Well, the Rubicon was crossed now, and there was nothing to be done.

To my surprise, little Redbeard had divined my anxiety. "Now don't you worry about the Sage," he said kindly. "A man that draws his royalties isn't going to starve. By the bones of John Murray, his publishers can send him a cook if necessary! This is a holiday for you, and don't you forget it."

And with this cheering sentiment in my mind we rolled sedately down the hill toward Greenbriar.

I am about as hardy as most folks, I think, but I confess I balked a little at the idea of facing the various people I know in Greenbriar as the owner of a bookvan and the companion of a literary luckster. Also I recollected that

if Andrew should try to trace us it would be as well for me to keep out of sight. So after telling Mr. Mifflin how I felt about matters I dived into the Parnassus and lay down most comfortably on the bunk. Bock the terrier joined me, and I rested there in great comfort of mind and body as we ambled down the grade. The sun shone through the little skylight gilding a tin pan that hung over the cook stove. Tacked here and there were portraits of authors, and I noticed a faded newspaper cutting pinned up. The headlines ran: "Literary Pedlar Lectures on Poetry." I read it through. Apparently the Professor (so I had begun to call him, as the aptness of the nickname stuck in my mind) had given a lecture in Camden, N. J., where he had asserted that Tennyson was a greater poet than Walt Whitman; and the boosters of the Camden poet had enlivened the evening with missiles. It seems that the chief Whitman disciple in Camden is Mr. Traubel; and Mr. Mifflin had started the rumpus by asserting that Tennyson, too, had "Traubels of his own." What an absurd creature the Professor was, I thought, as I lay comfortably lulled by the rolling wheels.

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Greenbriar is a straggling little town, built around a large common meadow. Mifflin's general plan in towns, he had told me, was to halt Parnassus in front of the principal store or hotel, and when a little throng had gathered he would put up the flaps of the van, distribute his cards, and deliver a harangue on the value of good books. I lay concealed inside, but I gathered from the sounds that this was what was happening. We came to a stop; I heard a growing murmur of voices and laughter outside, and then the click of the raised sides of the wagon. I heard Mifflin's shrill, slightly nasal voice making facetious remarks as he passed out the cards. Evidently Bock was quite accustomed to the routine, for though his tail wagged gently when the Professor began to talk, he lay quite peaceably dozing at my feet.

"My friends," said Mr. Mifflin. "You remember Abe Lincoln's joke about the dog? If you call a tail a leg, said Abe, how many legs has a dog? Five, you answer. No, says Abe; because calling a tail a leg doesn't make it a leg. Well, there are lots of us in the same case as that dog's tail. Calling us men doesn't *make*

us men. No creature on earth has a right to think himself a human being if he doesn't know at least one good book. The man that spends every evening chewing Piper Heidsieck at the store is unworthy to catch the intimations of a benevolent Creator. The man that's got a few good books on his shelf is making his wife happy, giving his children a square deal, and he's likely to be a better citizen himself. How about that, parson?"

I heard the deep voice of Reverend Kane, the Methodist minister: "You're dead right, Professor!" he shouted. "Tell us some more about books. I'm right with you!" Evidently Mr. Kane had been attracted by the sight of Parnassus, and I could hear him muttering to himself as he pulled one or two books from the shelves. How surprised he would have been if he had known I was inside the van! I took the precaution of slipping the bolt of the door at the back, and drew the curtains. Then I crept back into the bunk. I began to imagine what an absurd situation there would be if Andrew should arrive on the scene.

"You are all used to hucksters and pedlars

and fellows selling every kind of junk from brooms to bananas," said the Professor's voice. "But how often does any one come round here to sell you books? You've got your town library, I dare say; but there are some books that folks ought to own. I've got 'em all here from Bibles to cook books. They'll speak for themselves. Step up to the shelves, friends, and pick and choose."

I heard the parson asking the price of something he had found on the shelves, and I believe he bought it; but the hum of voices around the flanks of Parnassus was very soothing, and in spite of my interest in what was going on I'm afraid I fell asleep. I must have been pretty tired; anyway I never felt the van start again. The Professor says he looked in through the little window from the driver's seat, and saw me sound asleep. And the next thing I knew I woke up with a start to find myself rolling leisurely in the dark. Bock was still lying over my feet, and there was a faint, musical clang from the bucket under the van which struck against something now and then. The Professor was sitting in front, with a lighted lantern hanging

from the peak of the van roof. He was humming some outlandish song to himself, with a queer, monotonous refrain:

*Shipwrecked was I off Soft Perowse  
And right along the shore,  
And so I did resolve to roam  
The country to explore.  
Tommy rip fal lal and a balum tip  
Tommy rip fal lal I dee;  
And so I did resolve to roam  
The country for to see !*

I jumped out of the bunk, cracked my shins against something, and uttered a rousing halloo. Parnassus stopped, and the Professor pushed back the sliding window behind the driver's seat.

"Heavens!" I said. "Father Time, what o'clock is it?"

"Pretty near supper time, I reckon. You must have fallen asleep while I was taking money from the Philistines. I made nearly three dollars for you. Let's pull up along the road and have a bite to eat."

He guided Pegasus to one side of the road, and then showed me how to light the swinging lamp

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that hung under the skylight. "No use to light the stove on a lovely evening like this," he said. "I'll collect some sticks and we can cook outside. You get out your basket of grub and I'll make a fire." He unhitched Pegasus, tied her to a tree, and gave her a nose bag of oats. Then he rooted around for some twigs and had a fire going in a jiffy. In five minutes I had bacon and scrambled eggs sizzling in a frying pan, and he had brought out a pail of water from the cooler under the bunk, and was making tea.

I never enjoyed a picnic so much! It was a perfect autumn evening, windless and frosty, with a dead black sky and a tiny rim of new moon like a thumb-nail paring. We had our eggs and bacon, washed down with tea and condensed milk, and followed by bread and jam. The little fire burned blue and cozy, and we sat one each side of it while Bock scoured the pan and ate the crusts.

"This your own bread, Miss McGill?" he asked.

"Yes," I said. "I was calculating the other day that I've baked more than 400 loaves a year for the last fifteen years. That's more than

6,000 loaves of bread. They can put that on my tombstone."

"The art of baking bread is as transcendent a mystery as the art of making sonnets," said Redbeard. "And then your hot biscuits—they might be counted as shorter lyrics, I suppose—triolets perhaps. That makes quite an anthology, or a doxology, if you prefer it."

"Yeast is yeast, and West is West," I said, and was quite surprised at my own cleverness. I hadn't made a remark like that to Andrew in five years.

"I see you are acquainted with Kipling," he said.

"Oh, yes, every governess is."

"Where and whom did you govern?"

"I was in New York, with the family of a wealthy stockbroker. There were three children. I used to take them walking in Central Park."

"Did you ever go to Brooklyn?" he asked abruptly.

"Never," I replied.

"Ah!" he said. "That's just the trouble. New York is Babylon; Brooklyn is the true Holy City. New York is the city of envy,

office work, and hustle; Brooklyn is the region of homes and happiness. It is extraordinary: poor, harassed New Yorkers presume to look down on low-lying, home-loving Brooklyn, when as a matter of fact it is the precious jewel their souls are thirsting for and they never know it. Broadway: think how symbolic the name is. Broad is the way that leadeth to destruction! But in Brooklyn the ways are narrow, and they lead to the Heavenly City of content. Central Park: there you are—the centre of things, hemmed in by walls of pride. Now how much better is Prospect Park, giving a fair view over the hills of humility! There is no hope for New Yorkers, for they glory in their skyscraping sins; but in Brooklyn there is the wisdom of the lowly.”

“So you think that if I had been a governess in Brooklyn I should have been so contented that I would never have come with Andrew and compiled my anthology of 6,000 loaves of bread and the lesser lyrics?”

But the volatile Professor had already soared to other points of view, and was not to be thwarted by argument.

"Of course Brooklyn is a dingy place, really," he admitted. "But to me it symbolizes a state of mind, whereas New York is only a state of pocket. You see I was a boy in Brooklyn: it still trails clouds of glory for me. When I get back there and start work on my book I shall be as happy as Nebuchadnezzar when he left off grass and returned to tea and crumpets. 'Literature Among the Farmers' I'm going to call it, but that's a poor title. I'd like to read you some of my notes for it."

I'm afraid I poorly concealed a yawn. As a matter of fact I was sleepy, and it was growing chilly.

"Tell me first," I said, "where in the world are we, and what time is it?"

He pulled out a turnip watch. "It's nine o'clock," he said, "and we're about two miles from Shelby, I should reckon. Perhaps we'd better get along. They told me in Greenbriar that the Grand Central Hotel in Shelby is a good place to stop at. That's why I wasn't anxious to get there. It sounds so darned like New York."

He bundled the cooking utensils back into

Parnassus, hitched Peg up again, and tied Bock to the stern of the van. Then he insisted on giving me the two dollars and eighty cents he had collected in Greenbriar. I was really too sleepy to protest, and of course it was mine anyway. We creaked off along the dark and silent road between the pine woods. I think he talked fluently about his pilgrim's progress among the farmers of a dozen states, but (to be honest) I fell asleep in my corner of the seat. I woke up when we halted before the one hotel in Shelby—a plain, unimposing country inn, despite its absurd name. I left him to put Parnassus and the animals away for the night, while I engaged a room. Just as I got my key from the clerk he came into the dingy lobby.

“Well, Mr. Mifflin,” I said. “Shall I see you in the morning?”

“I had intended to push on to Port Vigor to-night,” he said, “but as it’s fully eight miles (they tell me), I guess I’ll bivouac here. I think I’ll go into the smoking-room and put them wise to some good books. We won’t say good-bye till to-morrow.”

My room was pleasant and clean (fairly so).

I took my suit case up with me and had a hot bath. As I fell asleep I heard a shrill voice ascending from below, punctuated with masculine laughter. The Pilgrim was making more converts!

## CHAPTER SIX

I HAD a curious feeling of bewilderment when I woke the next morning. The bare room with the red-and-blue rag carpet and green china toilet set was utterly strange. In the hall outside I heard a clock strike. "Heavens!" I thought, "I've overslept myself nearly two hours. What on earth will Andrew do for breakfast?" And then as I ran to close the window I saw the blue Parnassus with its startling red letters standing in the yard. Instantly I remembered. And discreetly peeping from behind the window shade I saw that the Professor, armed with a tin of paint, was blotting out his own name on the side of the van, evidently intending to substitute mine. That was something I had not thought of. However, I might as well make the best of it.

I dressed promptly, repacked my bag, and hurried downstairs for breakfast. The long

table was nearly empty, but one or two men sitting at the other end eyed me curiously. Through the window I could see my name in large, red letters, growing on the side of the van, as the Professor diligently wielded his brush. And when I had finished my coffee and beans and bacon I noticed with some amusement that the Professor had painted out the line about Shakespeare, Charles Lamb, and so on, and had substituted new lettering. The sign now read:

H. MCGILL'S  
TRAVELLING PARNASSUS  
GOOD BOOKS FOR SALE  
COOK BOOKS A SPECIALTY  
INQUIRE WITHIN

Evidently he distrusted my familiarity with the classics.

I paid my bill at the desk, and was careful also to pay the charge for putting up the horse and van overnight. Then I strolled into the stable yard, where I found Mr. Miffin regarding his handiwork with satisfaction. He had fresh-

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ened up all the red lettering, which shone brilliantly in the morning sunlight.

"Good-morning," I said.

He returned it.

"There!" he cried—"Parnassus is really yours! All the world lies before you! And I've got some more money for you. I sold some books last night. I persuaded the hotel keeper to buy several volumes of O. Henry for his smoking-room shelf, and I sold the 'Waldorf Cook Book' to the cook. My! wasn't her coffee awful? I hope the cook book will better it."

He handed me two limp bills and a handful of small change. I took it gravely and put it in my purse. This was really not bad—more than ten dollars in less than twenty-four hours.

"Parnassus seems to be a gold mine," I said.

"Which way do you think you'll go?" he asked.

"Well, as I know you want to get to Port Vigor I might just as well give you a lift that way," I answered.

"Good! I was hoping you'd say that. They tell me the stage for Port Vigor doesn't leave

till noon, and I think it would kill me to hang around here all morning with no books to sell. Once I get on the train I'll be all right."

Bock was tied up in a corner of the yard, under the side door of the hotel. I went over to release him while the Professor was putting Peg into harness. As I stooped to unfasten the chain from his collar I heard some one talking through the telephone. The hotel lobby was just over my head, and the window was open.

"What did you say?"

"———"

"McGill? Yes, sir, registered here last night. She's here now."

I didn't wait to hear more. Unfastening Bock, I hurried to tell Mifflin. His eyes sparkled.

"The Sage is evidently on our spoor," he chuckled. "Well, let's be off. I don't see what he can do even if he overhauls us."

The clerk was calling me from the window: "Miss McGill, your brother's on the wire and asks to speak to you."

"Tell him I'm busy," I retorted, and climbed

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onto the seat. It was not a diplomatic reply, I'm afraid, but I was too exhilarated by the keen morning and the spirit of adventure to stop to think of a better answer. Miffin clucked to Peg, and off we went.

The road from Shelby to Port Vigor runs across the broad hill slopes that trend toward the Sound; and below, on our left, the river lay glittering in the valley. It was a perfect landscape: the woods were all bronze and gold; the clouds were snowy white and seemed like heavenly washing hung out to air; the sun was warm and swam gloriously in an arch of superb blue. My heart was uplifted indeed. For the first time, I think, I knew how Andrew feels on those vagabond trips of his. Why had all this been hidden from me before? Why had the transcendent mystery of baking bread blinded me so long to the mysteries of sun and sky and wind in the trees? We passed a white farmhouse close to the road. By the gate sat the farmer on a log, whittling a stick and smoking his pipe. Through the kitchen window I could see a woman blacking the stove. I wanted to cry out: "Oh, silly woman! Leave your stove,

your pots and pans and chores, even if only for one day! Come out and see the sun in the sky and the river in the distance!" The farmer looked blankly at Parnassus as we passed, and then I remembered my mission as a distributor of literature. Mifflin was sitting with one foot on his bulging portmanteau, watching the tree tops rocking in the cool wind. He seemed to be far away in a morning muse. I threw down the reins and accosted the farmer.

"Good-morning, friend."

"Morning to you, ma'am," he said firmly.

"I'm selling books," I said. "I wonder if there isn't something you need?"

"Thanks, lady," he said, "but I bought a mort o' books last year an' I don't believe I'll ever read 'em this side Jordan. A whole set o' 'Funereal Orations' what an agent left on me at a dollar a month. I could qualify as earnest mourner at any death-bed merry-makin' now, I reckon."

"You need some books to teach you how to live, not how to die," I said. "How about your wife—wouldn't she enjoy a good book? How about some fairy tales for the children?"

"Bless me," he said, "I ain't got a wife. I never was a daring man, and I guess I'll confine my melancholy pleasures to them funereal orators for some time yet."

"Well, now, hold on a minute!" I exclaimed. "I've got just the thing for you." I had been looking over the shelves with some care, and remembered seeing a copy of "*Reveries of a Bachelor*." I clambered down, raised the flap of the van (it gave me quite a thrill to do it myself for the first time), and hunted out the book. I looked inside the cover and saw the letters *n m* in Miffin's neat hand.

"Here you are," I said. "I'll sell you that for thirty cents."

"Thank you kindly, ma'am," he said courteously. "But honestly I wouldn't know what to do with it. I am working through a government report on scabworm and fungus, and I sandwich in a little of them funereal speeches with it, and honestly that's about all the readin' I figure on. That an' the Port Vigor *Clarion*."

I saw that he really meant it, so I climbed back on the seat. I would have liked to talk to the woman in the kitchen who was

peering out of the window in amazement, but I decided it would be better to jog on and not waste time. The farmer and I exchanged friendly salutes, and Parnassus rumbled on.

The morning was so lovely that I did not feel talkative, and as the Professor seemed pensive I said nothing. But as Peg plodded slowly up a gentle slope he suddenly pulled a book out of his pocket and began to read aloud. I was watching the river, and did not turn round, but listened carefully:

*“Rolling cloud, rolleying wind, and wheeling sun—the blue tabernacle of sky, the circle of the seasons, the sparkling multitude of the stars—all these are surely part of one rhythmic, mystic whole. Everywhere, as we go about our small business, we must discern the fingerprints of the gigantic plan, the orderly and inexorable routine with neither beginning nor end, in which death is but a preface to another birth, and birth the certain forerunner of another death. We human beings are as powerless to conceive the motive or the moral of it all as the dog is powerless to understand the reasoning in his master’s mind. He sees the master’s acts, benevolent*

*or malerolent, and wags his tail. But the master's acts are always inscrutable to him. And so with us.*

*"And therefore, brethren, let us take the road with a light heart. Let us praise the bronze of the leaves and the crash of the surf while we have eyes to see and ears to hear. An honest amazement at the unspeakable beauties of the world is a comely posture for the scholar. Let us all be scholars under Mother Nature's eye.*

"How do you like that?" he asked.

"A little heavy, but very good," I said. "There's nothing in it about the transcendent mystery of baking bread!"

He looked rather blank.

"Do you know who wrote it?" he asked.

I made a valiant effort to summon some of my governessly recollections of literature.

"I give it up," I said feebly. "Is it Carlyle?"

"That is by Andrew McGill," he said. "One of his cosmic passages which are now beginning to be reprinted in schoolbooks. The blighter writes well."

I began to be uneasy lest I should be put through a literary catechism, so I said nothing,

but roused Peg into an amble. To tell the truth I was more curious to hear the Professor talk about his own book than about Andrew's. I had always carefully refrained from reading Andrew's stuff, as I thought it rather dull.

"As for me," said the Professor, "I have no facility at the grand style. I have always suffered from the feeling that it's better to read a good book than to write a poor one; and I've done so much mixed reading in my time that my mind is full of echoes and voices of better men. But this book I'm worrying about now really deserves to be written, I think, for it has a message of its own."

He gazed almost wistfully across the sunny valley. In the distance I caught a glint of the Sound. The Professor's faded tweed cap was slanted over one ear, and his stubby little beard shone bright red in the sun. I kept a sympathetic silence. He seemed pleased to have some one to talk to about his precious book.

"The world is full of great writers about literature," he said, "but they're all selfish and aristocratic. Addison, Lamb, Hazlitt, Emer-

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son, Lowell—take any one you choose—they all conceive the love of books as a rare and perfect mystery for the few—a thing of the secluded study where they can sit alone at night with a candle, and a cigar, and a glass of port on the table and a spaniel on the hearth-rug. What I say is, who has ever gone out into high roads and hedges to bring literature home to the plain man? To bring it home to his business and bosom, as somebody says? The farther into the country you go, the fewer and worse books you find. I've spent several years joggling around with this citadel of crime, and by the bones of Ben Ezra I don't think I ever found a really good book (except the Bible) at a farmhouse yet, unless I put it there myself. The mandarins of culture—what do they do to teach the common folk to read? It's no good writing down lists of books for farmers and compiling five-foot shelves; you've got to go out and visit the people yourself—take the books to them, talk to the teachers and bully the editors of country newspapers and farm magazines and tell the children stories—and then little by little you begin to

get good books circulating in the veins of the nation. It's a great work, mind you! It's like carrying the Holy Grail to some of these way-back farmhouses. And I wish there were a thousand Parnassuses instead of this one. I'd never give it up if it weren't for my book; but I want to write about my ideas in the hope of stirring other folk up, too. I don't suppose there's a publisher in the country will take it!"

"Try Mr. Decameron," I said. "He's always been very nice to Andrew."

"Think what it would mean," he cried, waving an eloquent hand, "if some rich man would start a fund to equip a hundred or so wagons like this to go huckstering literature around through the rural districts! It would pay, too, once you got started. Yes, by the bones of Webster! I went to a meeting of booksellers once, at some hotel in New York, and told 'em about my scheme. They laughed at me. But I've had more fun toting books around in this Parnassus than I could have had in fifty years sitting in a bookstore, or teaching school, or preaching. Life's full of savour when you go creaking along the road like this

Look at to-day, with the sun and the air and the silver clouds. Best of all, though, I love the rainy days. I used to pull up alongside the road, throw a rubber blanket over Peg, and Bock and I would curl up in the bunk and smoke and read. I used to read aloud to Bock: we went through 'Midshipman Easy' together, and a good deal of Shakespeare. He's a very bookish dog. We've seen some queer experiences in this Parnassus."

The hill road from Shelby to Port Vigor is a lonely one, as most of the farmhouses lie down in the valley. If I had known better we might have taken the longer and more populous way, but as a matter of fact I was enjoying the wide view and the solitary road lying white in the sunshine. We jogged along very pleasantly. Once more we stopped at a house where Milflin pleaded for a chance to exercise his art. I was much amused when he succeeded in selling a copy of "Grimm's Fairy Tales" to a shrewish spinster on the plea that she would enjoy reading the stories to her nephews and nieces who were coming to visit her.

"My!" he chuckled, as he gave me the dingy

quarter he had extracted. "There's nothing in that book as grim as she is!"

A little farther on we halted by a roadside spring to give Peg a drink, and I suggested lunch. I had laid in some bread and cheese in Shelby, and with this and some jam we made excellent sandwiches. As we were sitting by the fence the motor stage trundled past on its way to Port Vigor. A little distance down the road it halted, and then went on again. I saw a familiar figure walking back toward us.

"Now I'm in for it," I said to the Professor. "Here's Andrew!"

## CHAPTER SEVEN

**A**NDREW is just as thin as I am fat, and his clothes hang on him in the most comical way. He is very tall and shambling, wears a ragged beard and a broad Stetson hat, and suffers amazingly from hay fever in the autumn. (In fact, his essay on "Hay Fever" is the best thing he ever wrote, I think.) As he came striding up the road I noticed how his trousers fluttered at the ankles as the wind plucked at them. The breeze curled his beard back under his chin and his face was quite dark with anger. I couldn't help being amused; he looked so funny.

"The Sage looks like Bernard Shaw," whispered Miffin.

I always believe in drawing first blood.

"Good-morning, Andrew," I called cheerfully. "Want to buy any books?" I halted Pegasus, and Andrew stood a little in front of the wheel—partly out of breath and mostly out of temper.

"What on earth is this nonsense, Helen?" he said angrily. "You've led me the deuce of a chase since yesterday. And who is this--this person you're driving with?"

"Andrew," I said, "you forget your manners. Let me introduce Mr. Mifflin. I have bought his caravan and am taking a holiday, selling books. Mr. Mifflin is on his way to Port Vigor where he takes the train to Brooklyn."

Andrew stared at the Professor without speaking. I could tell by the blaze in his light-blue eyes that he was thoroughly angry, and I feared things would be worse before they were better. Andrew is slow to wrath, but a very hard person to deal with when roused. And I had some inkling by this time of the Professor's temperament. Moreover, I am afraid that some of my remarks had rather prejudiced him against Andrew, as a brother at any rate and apart from his excellent prose.

Mifflin had the next word. He had taken off his funny little cap, and his bare skull shone like an egg. I noticed a little sort of fairy ring of tiny drops around his crown.

"My dear sir," said Mifflin, "the proceedings

look somewhat unusual, but the facts are simple to narrate. Your sister has bought this van and its contents, and I have been instructing her in my theories of the dissemination of good books. You as a literary man. . . . ”

Andrew paid absolutely no attention to the Professor, and I saw a slow flush tinge Miffin's sallow cheek.

“Look here, Helen,” said Andrew, “do you think I propose to have my sister careering around the State with a strolling vagabond? Upon my soul you ought to have better sense—and at your age and weight! I got home yesterday and found your ridiculous note. I went to Mrs. Collins, and she knew nothing. I went to Mason's, and found him wondering who had bilked his telephone. I suppose you did that. He had seen this freight car of yours and put me on the track. But my God! I never thought to see a woman of forty abducted by gypsies!”

Miffin was about to speak but I waved him back.

“Now see here, Andrew,” I said, “you talk too quickly. A woman of forty (you exaggerate, by the way) who has compiled an anthology

of 6,000 loaves of bread and dedicated it to you deserves some courtesy. When *you* want to run off on some vagabond tour or other you don't hesitate to do it. You expect me to stay home and do the Lady Eglantine in the poultry yard. By the ghost of Susan B. Anthony, I won't do it! This is the first real holiday I've had in fifteen years, and I'm going to suit myself."

Andrew's mouth opened, but I shook my fist so convincingly that he halted.

"I bought this Parnassus from Mr. Mifflin fair and square for four hundred dollars. That's the price of about thirteen hundred dozen eggs," I said. (I had worked this out in my head while Mifflin was talking about his book.)

"The money's mine, and I'm going to use it my own way. Now, Andrew McGill, if you want to buy any books, you can parley with me. Otherwise, I'm on my way. You can expect me back when you see me." I handed him one of Mifflin's little cards, which were in a pocket at the side of the van, and gathered up the reins. I was really angry, for Andrew had been both unreasonable and insulting.

Andrew looked at the card, and tore it in

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halves. He looked at the side of Parnassus where the fresh red lettering was still damp.

"Well, upon my word," he said, "you must be crazy." He burst into a violent fit of sneezing—a last touch of hay fever, I suspect, as there was still goldenrod in the meadows. He coughed and sneezed furiously, which made him madder than ever. At last he turned to Miffin who was sitting bald-headed with a flushed face and very bright eyes. Andrew took him all in, the shabby Norfolk jacket, the bulging memorandum book in his pocket, the stuffed portmanteau under his foot, even the copy of "Happiness and Hayseed" which had dropped to the floor and lay back up.

"Look here, you," said Andrew, "I don't know by what infernal arts you cajoled my sister away to go vagabonding in a huckster's wagon, but I know this, that if you've cheated her out of her money I'll have the law on you."

I tried to insert a word of protest, but matters had gone too far. The Professor was as mad as Andrew now.

"By the bones of Piers Plowman," he said, "I had expected to meet a man of letters and the author of this book"—he held up "Happiness

and Hayseed"—"but I see I was mistaken. I tell you, sir, a man who would insult his sister before a stranger, as you have done, is an oaf and a cad." He threw the book over the hedge, and before I could say a word he had vaulted over the off wheel and ran round behind the van.

"Look here, sir," he said, with his little red beard bristling, "your sister is over age and acting of her own free will. By the bones of the Baptist, I don't blame her for wanting a vacation if this is the way you treat her. She is nothing to me, sir, and I am nothing to her, but I propose to be a teacher to you. Put up your hands and I'll give you a lesson!"

This was too much for me. I believe I screamed aloud, and started to clamber from the van. But before I could do anything the two fanatics had begun to pummel each other. I saw Andrew swing savagely at Mifflin, and Mifflin hit him square on the chin. Andrew's hat fell on the road. Peg stood placidly, and Bock made as if to grab Andrew's leg, but I hopped out and seized him.

It was certainly a weird sight. I suppose I should have wrung my hands and had hysterics,

but as a matter of fact I was almost amused, it was so silly. Thank goodness the road was deserted.

Andrew was a foot taller than the Professor, but awkward, loosely knit, and unmuscular, while the little Redbeard was wiry as a cat. Also Andrew was so furious that he was quite beside himself, and Mifflin was in the cold anger that always wins. Andrew landed a couple of flailing blows on the other man's chest and shoulders, but in thirty seconds he got another punch on the chin followed by one on the nose that tumbled him over backward.

Andrew sat in the road fishing for a handkerchief, and Mifflin stood glaring at him, but looking very ill at ease. Neither of them said a word. Bock broke away from me and capered and danced about Mifflin's feet as if it were all a game. It was an extraordinary scene.

Andrew got up, mopping his bleeding nose.

"Upon my soul," he said, "I almost respect you for that punch. But by Jove I'll have the law on you for kidnapping my sister. You're a fine kind of a pirate."

Mifflin said nothing.

“Don’t be a fool, Andrew,” I said. “Can’t you see that I want a little adventure of my own? Go home and bake six thousand loaves of bread, and by the time they’re done I’ll be back again. I think two men of your age ought to be ashamed of yourselves. I’m going off to sell books.” And with that I climbed up to the seat and clucked to Pegasus. Andrew and Miffin and Bock remained standing in the road.

I was mad all the way through. I was mad at both men for behaving like schoolboys. I was mad at Andrew for being so unreasonable, yet in a way I admired him for it; I was mad at Miffin for giving Andrew a bloody nose, and yet I appreciated the spirit in which it was done. I was mad at myself for causing all the trouble, and I was mad at Parnassus. If there had been a convenient cliff handy I would have pushed the old thing over it. But now I was in for it, and just had to go on. Slowly I rolled up a long grade, and then saw Port Vigor lying ahead and the broad blue stretches of the Sound.

Parnassus rumbled on with its pleasant creak, and the mellow sun and sweep of the air soon soothed me. I began to taste salt in the wind,

and above the meadows two or three seagulls were circling. Like all women, my angry mood melted into a reaction of exaggerated tenderness and I began to praise both Andrew and Mifflin in my heart. How fine to have a brother so solicitous of his sister's welfare and reputation! And yet, how splendid the little, scrawny Professor had been! How quick to resent an insult and how bold to avenge it! His absurd little tweed cap was lying on the seat, and I picked it up almost sentimentally. The lining was frayed and torn. From my suit case in the van I got out a small sewing kit, and hanging the reins on a hook I began to stitch up the rents as Peg jogged along. I thought with amusement of the quaint life Mr. Mifflin had led in his "caravan of culture." I imagined him addressing the audience of Whitman disciples in Camden, and wondered how the fuss ended. I imagined him in his beloved Brooklyn, strolling in Prospect Park and preaching to chance comers his gospel of good books. How different was his militant love of literature from Andrew's quiet satisfaction. And yet how much they really had in common! It tickled me to think

of Miffin reading aloud from "Happiness and Hayseed," and praising it so highly, just before fighting with the author and giving him a bloody nose. I remembered that I should have spoken to Andrew about feeding the hens, and reminded him of his winter undergarments. What helpless creatures men are, after all!

I finished mending the cap in high good humour.

I had hardly laid it down when I heard a quick step in the road behind me, and looking back, there was Miffin, striding along with his bald pate covered with little beads of moisture. Bock trotted sedately at his heels. I halted Peg.

"Well," I said, "what's happened to Andrew?"

The Professor still looked a bit shamefaced. "The Sage is a tenacious person," he said. "We argued for a bit without much satisfaction. As a matter of fact we nearly came to blows again, only he got another waft of goldenrod, which started him sneezing, and then his nose began bleeding once more. He is convinced that I'm a ruffian, and said so in excellent prose. Honestly,

I admire him a great deal. I believe he intends to have the law on me. I gave him my Brooklyn address in case he wants to follow the matter up. I think I rather pleased him by asking him to autograph 'Happiness and Hayseed' for me. I found it lying in the ditch."

"Well," I said, "you two are certainly a great pair of lunatics. You both ought to go on the stage. You'd be as good as Weber and Fields. Did he give you the autograph?"

He pulled the book out of his pocket. Scrawled in it in pencil were the words *I have shed blood for Mr. Mifflin. Andrew McGill.*

"I shall read the book again with renewed interest," said Mifflin. "May I get in?"

"By all means," I said. "There's Port Vigor in front of us."

He put on his cap, noticed that it seemed to feel different, pulled it off again, and then looked at me in a quaint embarrassment.

"You are very good, Miss McGill," he said.

"Where did Andrew go?" I asked.

"He set off for Shelby on foot," Mifflin answered. "He has a grand stride for walking. He suddenly remembered that he had left some

potatoes boiling on the fire yesterday afternoon, and said he must get back to attend to them. He said he hoped you would send him a postal card now and then. Do you know, he reminds me of Thoreau more than ever."

"He reminds me of a burnt cooking pot," I said. "I suppose all my kitchenware will be in a horrible state when I get home."

## CHAPTER EIGHT

**P**ORT VIGOR is a fascinating old town. It is built on a point jutting out into the Sound. Dimly in the distance one can see the end of Long Island, which Mifflin viewed with sparkling eyes. It seemed to bring him closer to Brooklyn. Several schooners were beating along the estuary in the fresh wind, and there was a delicious tang of brine in the air. We drove direct to the station where the Professor alighted. We took his portmanteau, and shut Bock inside the van to prevent the dog from following him. Then there was an awkward pause as he stood by the wheel with his cap off.

“Well, Miss McGill,” he said, “there’s an express train at five o’clock, so with luck I shall be in Brooklyn to-night. My brother’s address is 600 Abingdon Avenue, and I hope when you’re sending a card to the Sage you’ll let me have one, too. I shall be very homesick for Parnassus, but

I'd rather leave her with you than with any one I know."

He bowed very low, and before I could say a word he blew his nose violently and hurried away. I saw him carrying his valise into the station, and then he disappeared. I suppose that living alone with Andrew for all these years has unused me to the eccentricities of other people, but surely this little Redbeard was one of the strangest beings one would be likely to meet.

Bock yowled dismally inside, and I did not feel in any mood to sell books in Port Vigor. I drove back into the town and stopped at a tea shop for a pot of tea and some toast. When I came out I found that quite a little crowd had collected, partly owing to the strange appearance of Parnassus and partly because of Bock's plaintive cries from within. Most of the on-lookers seemed to suspect the outfit of being part of a travelling menagerie, so almost against my will I put up the flaps, tied Bock to the tail of the wagon, and began to answer the humorous questions of the crowd. Two or three bought books without any urging, and it was some time

before I could get away. Finally I shut up the van and pulled off, as I was afraid of seeing some one I knew. As I turned into the Woodbridge Road I heard the whistle of the five o'clock train to New York.

The twenty miles of road between Sabine Farm and Port Vigor was all familiar to me, but now to my relief I struck into a region that I had never visited. On my occasional trips to Boston I had always taken the train at Port Vigor, so the country roads were unknown. But I had set out on the Woodbridge way because Mifflin had spoken of a farmer, Mr. Pratt, who lived about four miles out of Port Vigor, on the Woodbridge Road. Apparently Mr. Pratt had several times bought books from the Professor and the latter had promised to visit him again. So I felt in duty bound to oblige a good customer.

After the varied adventures of the last two days it was almost a relief to be alone to think things over. Here was I, Helen McGill, in a queer case indeed. Instead of being home at Sabine Farm getting supper, I was trundling along a strange road, the sole owner of a Par-

nassus (probably the only one in existence), a horse, and a dog, and a cartload of books on my hands. Since the morning of the day before my whole life had twisted out of its accustomed orbit. I had spent four hundred dollars of my savings; I had sold about thirteen dollars' worth of books; I had precipitated a fight and met a philosopher. Not only that, I was dimly beginning to evolve a new philosophy of my own. And all this in order to prevent Andrew from buying a lot more books! At any rate, I had been successful in that. When he had seen Parnassus at last, he had hardly looked at her—except in tones of scorn. I caught myself wondering whether the Professor would allude to the incident in his book, and hoping that he would send me a copy. But after all, why should he mention it? To him it was only one of a thousand adventures. As he had said angrily to Andrew, he was nothing to me, nor I to him. How could he realize that this was the first adventure I had had in the fifteen years I had been—what was it he called it?—compiling my anthology. Well, the funny little gingersnap!

I kept Bock tied to the back of the van, as I

was afraid he might take a notion to go in search of his master. As we jogged on, and the falling sun cast a level light across the way, I got a bit lonely. This solitary vagabonding business was a bit sudden after fifteen years of home life. The road lay close to the water and I watched the Sound grow a deeper blue and then a dull purple. I could hear the surf pounding, and on the end of Long Island a far-away lighthouse showed a ruby spark. I thought of the little gingersnap roaring toward New York on the express, and wondered whether he was travelling in a Pullman or a day coach. A Pullman chair would feel easy after that hard Parnassus seat.

By and by we neared a farmhouse which I took to be Mr. Pratt's. It stood close to the road, with a big, red barn behind and a gilt weathervane representing a galloping horse. Curiously enough Peg seemed to recognize the place, for she turned in at the gate and neighed vigorously. It must have been a favourite stopping place for the Professor.

Through a lighted window I could see people sitting around a table. Evidently the Pratts were at supper. I drew up in the yard. Some

one looked out of a window, and I heard a girl's voice:

"Why, Pa, here's Parnassus!"

Gingersnap must have been a welcome visitor at that farm, for in an instant the whole family turned out with a great scraping of chairs and clatter of dishes. A tall, sunburnt man, in a clean shirt with no collar, led the group, and then came a stout woman about my own build, and a hired man and three children.

"Goodevening!" I said. "Is this Mr. Pratt?"

"Sure thing!" said he. "Where's the Professor?"

"On his way to Brooklyn," said I. "And I've got Parnassus. He told me to be sure to call on you. So here we are."

"Well, I want to know!" ejaculated Mrs. Pratt. "Think of Parnassus turned suffrage! Ben, you put up the critters, and I'll take Mrs. Mifflin in to supper."

"Hold on there," I said. "My name's McGill—Miss McGill. See, it's painted on the wagon. I bought the outfit from Mr. Mifflin. A business proposition entirely."

"Well, well," said Mr. Pratt. "We're glad to

see any friend of the Perfessor. Sorry he's not here, too. Come right in and have a bite with us."

They were certainly good-hearted folk, Mr. and Mrs. Ben Pratt. He put Peg and Bock away in the barn and gave them their supper, while Mrs. Pratt took me up to her spare bedroom and brought me a jug of hot water. Then they all trooped back into the dining-room and the meal began again. I am a connoisseur of farm cooking, I guess, and I've got to hand it to Beulah Pratt that she was an A-1 housewife. Her hot biscuit was perfect; the coffee was real Mocha, simmered, not boiled; the cold sausage and potato salad was as good as any Andrew ever got. And she had a smoking-hot omelet sent in for me, and opened a pot of her own strawberry preserve. The children (two boys and a girl) sat open-mouthed, nudging one another, and Mr. Pratt got out his pipe while I finished up on stewed pears and cream and chocolate cake. It was a regular meal. I wondered what Andrew was eating and whether he had found the nest behind the wood pile where the red hen always drops her eggs.

"Well, well," said Mr. Pratt, "tell us about

the Perfessor. We was expectin' him here some time this fall. He generally gets here around cider time."

"I guess there isn't so much to tell," I said. "He stopped up at our place the other day, and said he wanted to sell his outfit. So I bought him out. He was pining to get back to Brooklyn and write a book."

"That book o' his!" said Mrs. Pratt. "He was always talkin' on it, but I don't believe he ever started it yet."

"Whereabout do you come from, Miss McGill?" said Pratt. I could see he was mighty puzzled at a woman driving a vanload of books around the country, alone.

"Over toward Redfield," I said.

"You any kin to that writer that lives up that way?"

"You mean Andrew McGill?" I said. "He's my brother."

"Do tell!" exclaimed Mrs. Pratt. "Why the Perfessor thought a terrible lot of him. He read us all to sleep with one of his books one night. Said he was the best literature in this State, I do believe."

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I smiled to myself as I thought of the set-to on the road from Shelby.

"Well," said Pratt, "if the Perfessor's got any better friends than us in these parts, I'm glad to meet 'em. He come here first time 'bout four years ago. I was up working in the hay-field that afternoon, and I heard a shout down by the mill pond. I looked over that way and saw a couple o' kids waving their arms and screamin'. I ran down the hill and there was the Perfessor just a pullin' my boy Dick out o' the water. Dick's this one over here."

Dick, a small boy of thirteen or so, grew red under his freckles.

"The kids had been foolin' around on a raft there, an' first thing you know Dick fell in, right into deep water, over by the dam. Couldn't swim a stroke, neither. And the Perfessor, who jest happened to be comin' along in that 'bus of his, heard the boys yell. Didn't he hop out o' the wagon as spry as a chimpanzee, skin over the fence, an' jump into the pond, swim out there an' tow the boy in! Yes, ma'am, he saved that boy's life then an' no mistake. That man can read me to sleep with

poetry any night he has a mind to. He's a plumb fine little firecracker, the Perfessor."

Farmer Pratt pulled hard on his pipe. Evidently his friendship for the wandering bookseller was one of the realities of his life.

"Yes, ma'am," he went on, "that Perfessor has been a good friend to me, sure enough. We brought him an' the boy back to the house. The boy had gone down three times an' the Perfessor had to dive to find him. They were both purty well all in, an' I tell you I was scared. But we got Dick around somehow—rolled him on a sugar bar'l, an' poured whiskey in him, an' worked his arms, an' put him in hot blankets. By and by he come to. An' then I found that the Perfessor, gettin' over the barb-wire fence so quick (when he lit for the pond) had torn a hole in his leg you could put four fingers in. There was his trouser all stiff with blood, an' he not sayin' a thing. Pluckiest little runt in three States, by Judas! Well, we put *him* to bed, too, and then the Missus keeled over, an' we put *her* to bed. Three of them, by time the Doc got here. Great old summer afternoon that was! But bless your heart, we couldn't keep the Per-

fessor abed long. Next day he was out lookin' fer his poetry books, an' first thing you know he had us all rounded up an' was preachin' good literature at us like any evangelist. I guess we all fell asleep over his poetry, so then he started on readin' that 'Treasure Island' story to us, wasn't it, Mother? By hickory, we none of us fell asleep over that. He started the kids readin' so they been at it ever since, and Dick's top boy at school now. Teacher says she never saw such a boy for readin'. That's what Perfessor done for us! Well, tell us 'bout yerself Miss McGill. Is there any good books we ought to read? I used to pine for some o' that feller Shakespeare my father used to talk about so much, but Perfessor always 'lowed it was over my head!"

It gave me quite a thrill to hear all this about Mifflin. I could readily imagine the masterful little man captivating the simple-hearted Pratts with his eloquence and earnestness. And the story of the mill pond had its meaning, too. Little Redbeard was no mere wandering crank - he was a real man, cool and steady of brain, with the earmarks of a hero. I felt a sudden

gush of warmth as I recalled his comical ways.

Mrs. Pratt lit a fire in her Franklin stove and I racked my head wondering how I could tread worthily in the Professor's footsteps. Finally I fetched the "Jungle Book" from Parnassus and read them the story of Rikki-Tikki-Tavi. There was a long pause when I had finished.

"Say, Pa," said Dick shyly, "that mongoose was rather like Professor, wasn't he!"

Plainly the Professor was the traditional hero of this family, and I began to feel rather like an imposter!

I suppose it was foolish of me, but I had already made up my mind to push on to Woodbridge that night. It could not be more than four miles, and the time was not much after eight. I felt a little twinge of quite unworthy annoyance because I was still treading in the glamour of the Professor's influence. The Pratts would talk of nothing else, and I wanted to get somewhere where I would be estimated at my own value, not merely as his disciple. "Darn the Redbeard," I said to myself, "I think he has bewitched these people!" And in spite of their

protests and invitations to stay the night, I insisted on having Peg hitched up. I gave them the copy of the "Jungle Book" as a small return for their hospitality, and finally sold Mr. Pratt a little copy of "Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare" which I thought he could read without brain fever. Then I lit my lantern and after a chorus of good-byes Parnassus rolled away. "Well," I said to myself as I turned into the high road once more, "drat the gingersnap, he seems to hypnotize everybody . . . he must be nearly in Brooklyn by this time!"

It was very quiet along the road, also very dark, for the sky had clouded over and I could see neither moon nor stars. As it was a direct road I should have had no difficulty, and I suppose I must have fallen into a doze during which Peg took a wrong turning. At any rate, I realized about half-past nine that Parnassus was on a much rougher road than the highway had any right to be, and there were no telephone poles to be seen. I knew that they stretched all along the main road, so plainly I had made a mistake. I was reluctant for a moment to admit that I could be wrong, and just then Peg

stumbled heavily and stood still. She paid no heed to my exhortations, and when I got out and carried my lantern to see whether anything was in the way, I found that she had cast a shoe and her foot was bleeding. The shoe must have dropped off some way back and she had picked up a nail or something in the quick. I saw no alternative but to stay where I was for the night.

This was not very pleasant, but the adventures of the day had put me into a stoical frame of mind, and I saw no good in repining. I unhitched Peg, sponged her foot, and tied her to a tree. I would have made more careful explorations to determine just where I was, but a sharp patter of rain began to fall. So I climbed into my Parnassus, took Bock in with me, and lit the swinging lamp. By this time it was nearly ten o'clock. There was nothing to do but turn in, so I took off my boots and lay down in the bunk. Bock lay quite comfortably on the floor of the van. I meant to read for a while, and so did not turn out the light, but I fell asleep almost immediately.

I woke up at half-past eleven and turned out the lamp, which had made the van very warm.

I opened the little windows front and back, and would have opened the door, but I feared Bock might slip away. It was still raining a little. To my annoyance I felt very wakeful. I lay for some time listening to the patter of raindrops on the roof and skylight—a very snug sound when one is warm and safe. Every now and then I could hear Peg stamping in the underbrush. I was almost dozing off again when Bock gave a low growl.

No woman of my bulk has a right to be nervous, I guess, but instantly my security vanished! The patter of the rain seemed menacing, and I imagined a hundred horrors. I was totally alone and unarmed, and Bock was not a large dog. He growled again, and I felt worse than before. I imagined that I heard stealthy sounds in the bushes, and once Peg snorted as though frightened. I put my hand down to pat Bock, and found that his neck was all bristly like a fighting cock. He uttered a queer half growl, half whine, which gave me a chill. Some one must be prowling about the van, but in the falling rain I could hear nothing.

I felt I must do something. I was afraid to

call out lest I betray the fact that there was only a woman in the van. My expedient was absurd enough, but at any rate it satisfied my desire to act. I seized one of my boots and banged vigorously on the floor, at the same time growling in as deep and masculine a voice as I could muster: "*What the hell's the matter? What the hell's the matter?*" This sounds silly enough, I dare say, but it afforded me some relief. And as Bock shortly ceased growling, it apparently served some purpose.

I lay awake for a long time, tingling all over with nervousness. Then I began to grow calmer, and was getting drowsy almost in spite of myself when I was aroused by the unmistakable sound of Bock's tail thumping on the floor—a sure sign of pleasure. This puzzled me quite as much as his growls. I did not dare strike a light, but could hear him sniffing at the door of the van and whining with eagerness. This seemed very uncanny, and again I crept stealthily out of the bunk and pounded on the floor lustily, this time with the frying pan, which made an unearthly din. Peg neighed and snorted, and Bock began to bark. Even

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in my anxiety I almost laughed. "It sounds like an insane asylum," I thought, and reflected that probably the disturbance was only caused by some small animal. Perhaps a rabbit or a skunk which Bock had winded and wanted to chase. I patted him, and crawled into my bunk once more.

But my real excitement was still to come. About half an hour later I heard unmistakable footsteps alongside the van. Bock growled furiously, and I lay in a panic. Something jarred one of the wheels. Then broke out a most extraordinary racket. I heard quick steps, Peg whinneyed, and something fell heavily against the back of the wagon. There was a violent scuffle on the ground, the sound of blows, and rapid breathing. With my heart jumping I peered out of one of the back windows. There was barely any light, but dimly I could see a tumbling mass which squirmed and writhed on the ground. Something struck one of the rear wheels so that Parnassus trembled. I heard hoarse swearing, and then the whole body, whatever it was, rolled off into the underbrush. There was a terrific crashing and snapping of

twigs. Bock whined, growled, and pawed madly at the door. And then complete silence.

My nerves were quite shattered by this time. I don't think I had been so frightened since childhood days when I awakened from a nightmare. Little trickles of fear crept up and down my spine and my scalp prickled. I pulled Bock on the bunk, and lay with one hand on his collar. He, too, seemed agitated and sniffed gingerly now and then. Finally, however, he gave a sigh and fell asleep. I judged it might have been two o'clock, but I did not like to strike a light. And at last I fell into a doze.

When I woke the sun was shining brilliantly and the air was full of the chirping of birds. I felt stiff and uneasy from sleeping in my clothes, and my foot was numb from Bock's weight.

I got up and looked out of the window. Parnassus was standing in a narrow lane by a grove of birch trees. The ground was muddy, and smeared with footprints behind the van. I opened the door and looked around. The first thing I saw, on the ground by one of the wheels, was a battered tweed cap.

## CHAPTER NINE

**M**Y FEELINGS were as mixed as a crushed nutsundae. So the Professor hadn't gone to Brooklyn after all! What did he mean by prowling after me like a sleuth? Was it just homesickness for Parnassus? Not likely! And then the horrible noises I had heard in the night; had some tramp been hanging about the van in the hope of robbing me? Had the tramp attacked Miffin? Or had Miffin attacked the tramp? Who had got the better of it?

I picked up the muddy cap and threw it into the van. Anyway, I had problems of my own to tackle, and those of the Professor could wait.

Peg whinneyed when she saw me. I examined her foot. Seeing it by daylight the trouble was not hard to diagnose. A long, jagged piece of slate was wedged in the frog of the foot. I easily wrenched it out, heated some

water, and gave the hoof another sponging. It would be all right when shod once more. But where was the shoe?

I gave the horse some oats, cooked an egg and a cup of coffee for myself at the little kerosene stove, and broke up a dog biscuit for Bock. I marvelled once more at the completeness of Parnassus's furnishings. Bock helped me to scour the pan. He sniffed eagerly at the cap when I showed it to him, and wagged his tail.

It seemed to me that the only thing I could do was to leave Parnassus and the animals where they were and retrace my steps as far as the Pratt farm. Undoubtedly Mr. Pratt would be glad to sell me a horse-shoe and send his hired man to do the job for me. I could not drive Peg as she was, with a sore foot and without a shoe. I judged Parnassus would be quite safe: the lane seemed to be a lonely one leading to a deserted quarry. I tied Bock to the steps to act as a guard, took my purse and the Professor's cap with me, locked the door of the van, and set off along the back track. Bock whined and tugged violently when he saw me disappearing, but I could see no other course.

The lane rejoined the main road about half a mile back. I must have been asleep or I could never have made the mistake of turning off. I don't see why Peg should have made the turn, unless her foot hurt and she judged the side track would be a good place to rest. She must have been well used to stopping overnight in the open.

I strode along pondering over my adventures, and resolved to buy a pistol when I got to Woodbridge. I remember thinking that I could write quite a book now myself. Already I began to feel quite a hardened pioneer. It doesn't take an adaptable person long to accustom one's self to a new way of life, and the humdrum routine of the farm certainly looked prosy compared to voyaging with Parnassus. When I had got beyond Woodbridge, and had crossed the river, I would begin to sell books in earnest. Also I would buy a notebook and jot down my experiences. I had heard of bookselling as a profession for women, but I thought that my taste of it was probably unique. I might even write a book that would rival Andrew's—yes, and Millin's. And that brought my thoughts to Barbarossa again.

Of all extraordinary people, I thought, he certainly takes the cake—and then, rounding a bend, I saw him sitting on a rail fence, with his head shining in the sunlight. My heart gave a sort of jump. I do believe I was getting fond of the Professor. He was examining something which he held in his hand.

“You’ll get sunstroke,” I said. “Here’s your cap.” And I pulled it out of my pocket and tossed it to him.

“Thanks,” he said, as cool as you please. “And here’s your horse-shoe. Fair exchange!”

I burst out laughing, and he looked disconcerted, as I hoped he would.

“I thought you’d be in Brooklyn by now,” I said, “at 600 Abingdon Avenue, laying out Chapter One. What do you mean by following me this way? You nearly frightened me to death last night. I felt like one of Fenimore Cooper’s heroines, shut up in the blockhouse while the redskins prowled about.”

He flushed and looked very uncomfortable.

“I owe you an apology,” he said. “I certainly never intended that you should see me. I bought a ticket for New York and checked my

bag through. And then while I was waiting for the train it came over me that your brother was right, and that it was a darned risky thing for you to go jaunting about alone in Parnassus. I was afraid something might happen. I followed along the road behind you, keeping well out of sight."

"Where were you while I was at Pratt's?"

"Sitting not far down the road eating bread and cheese," he said. "Also I wrote a poem, a thing I very rarely do."

"Well, I hope your ears burned," I said, "for those Pratts have certainly raised you to the peerage."

He got more uncomfortable than ever.

"Well," he said, "I dare say it was all an error, but anyway I *did* follow you. When you turned off into that lane, I kept pretty close behind you. As it happens, I know this bit of country, and there are very often some hoboes hanging around the old quarry up that lane. They have a cave there where they go into winter quarters. I was afraid some of them might bother you. You could hardly have chosen a worse place to camp out. By

the bones of George Eliot, Pratt ought to have warned you. I can't conceive why you didn't stop at his house overnight anyway."

"If you must know, I got weary of hearing them sing your praises."

I could see that he was beginning to get nettled.

"I regret having alarmed you," he said. "I see that Peg has dropped a shoe. If you'll let me fix it for you, after that I won't bother you."

We turned back again along the road, and I noticed the right side of his face for the first time. Under the ear was a large livid bruise.

"That hobo, or whoever he was," I said, "must have been a better fighter than Andrew. I see he landed on your cheek. Are you always fighting?"

His annoyance disappeared. Apparently the Professor enjoyed a fight almost as much as he did a good book.

"Please don't regard the last twenty-four hours as typical of me," he said with a chuckle. "I am so unused to being a squire of dames that perhaps I take the responsibilities too seriously."

"Did you sleep at all last night?" I asked. I think I began to realize for the first time that the gallant little creature had been out all night in a drizzling rain, simply to guard me from possible annoyance; and I had been unforgivably churlish about it.

"I found a very fine haystack in a field overlooking the quarry. I crawled into the middle of it. A haystack is sometimes more comfortable than a boarding-house."

"Well," I said penitently, "I can never forgive myself for the trouble I've caused you. It was awfully good of you to do what you did. Please put your cap on and don't catch cold."

We walked for several minutes in silence. I watched him out of the corner of my eye. I was afraid he might have caught his death of cold from being out all night in the wet, to say nothing of the scuffle he had had with the tramp; but he really looked as chipper as ever.

"How do you like the wild life of a bookseller?" he said. "You must read George Borrow. He would have enjoyed Parnassus."

"I was just thinking, when I met you, that I could write a book about my adventures."

"Good!" he said. "We might collaborate."

"There's another thing we might collaborate on," I said, "and that's breakfast. I'm sure you haven't had any."

"No," he said, "I don't think I have. I never lie when I know I shan't be believed."

"I haven't had any, either," I said. I thought that to tell an untruth would be the least thing I could do to reward the little man for his unselfishness.

"Well," he said, "I really thought that by this time——"

He broke off. "Was that Bock barking?" he asked sharply.

We had been walking slowly, and had not yet reached the spot where the lane branched from the main road. We were still about three quarters of a mile from the place where I had camped overnight. We both listened carefully, but I could hear nothing but the singing of the telephone wires along the road.

"No matter," he said. "I thought I heard a dog." But I noticed that he quickened his pace.

"I was saying," he continued, "that I had really thought to have lost Parnassus for good by

this morning, but I'm tickled to death to have a chance to see her again. I hope she'll be as good a friend to you as she has been to me. I suppose you'll sell her when you return to the Sage?"

"I don't know I'm sure," I said. "I must confess I'm still a little at sea. My desire for an adventure seems to have let me in deeper than I expected. I begin to see that there's more in this bookselling game than I thought. Honestly, it's getting into my blood."

"Well, that's fine," he said heartily. "I couldn't have left Parnassus in better hands. You must let me know what you do with her, and then perhaps, when I've finished my book, I can buy her back."

We struck off into the lane. The ground was slippery under the trees and we went single file, Miffin in front. I looked at my watch—it was nine o'clock, just an hour since I had left the van. As we neared the spot Miffin kept looking ahead through the birch trees in a queer way.

"What's the matter?" I said. "We're almost there, aren't we?"

"We *are* there," he said. "Here's the place."

Parnassus was gone!

## CHAPTER TEN

**W**E STOOD in complete dismay—I did, at any rate—for about as long as it takes to peel a potato. There could be no doubt in which direction the van had moved, for the track of the wheels was plain. It had gone farther up the lane toward the quarry. In the earth, which was still soggy, were a number of footprints.

“By the bones of Polycarp!” exclaimed the Professor, “those hoboes have stolen the van. I guess they think it’ll make a fine Pullman sleeper for them. If I’d realized there was more than one of them I’d have hung around closer. They need a lesson.”

Good Lord! I thought, here’s Don Quixote about to wade into another fight.

“Hadn’t we better go back and get Mr. Pratt?” I asked.

This was obviously the wrong thing to say.

It put the fiery little man all the more on his mettle. His beard bristled. "Nothing of the sort!" he said. "Those fellows are cowards and vagabonds anyway. They can't be far off; you haven't been away more than an hour, have you? If they've done anything to Bock, by the bones of Chaucer, I'll harry them. I *thought* I heard him bark."

He hurried up the lane, and I followed in a panicky frame of mind. The track wound along a hillside, between a high bank and a forest of birch trees. I think the distance can't have been more than a quarter of a mile. Anyway, in a very few minutes the road made a sharp twist to the right and we found ourselves looking down into the quarry, over a sheer rocky drop of a hundred feet at least. Below, drawn over to one side of the wall of rock, stood Parnassus. Peg was between the shafts. Bock was nowhere to be seen. Sitting by the van were three disreputable looking men. The smoke of a cooking fire rose into the air; evidently they were making free with my little larder.

"Keep back," said the Professor softly.

"Don't let them see us." He flattened himself in the grass and crawled to the edge of the cliff. I did the same, and we lay there, invisible from below, but quite able to see everything in the quarry. The three tramps were evidently enjoying an excellent breakfast.

"This place is a regular hang-out for these fellows," Miffin whispered. "I've seen hoboes about here every year. They go into winter quarters about the end of October, usually. There's an old blasted-out section of this quarry that makes a sheltered dormitory for them, and as the place isn't worked any more they're not disturbed here so long as they don't make mischief in the neighbourhood. We'll give them. . . ."

"Hands up!" said a rough voice behind us. I looked round. There was a fat, red-faced villainous-looking creature covering us with a shiny revolver. It was an awkward situation. Both the Professor and I were lying full length on the ground. We were quite helpless.

"Get up!" said the tramp in a husky, nasty voice. "I guess youse thought we wasn't covering our trail? Well, we'll have to tie

you up, I reckon, while we get away with this Crystal Pallis of yourn."

I scrambled to my feet, but to my surprise the Professor continued to lie at full length.

"Get up, deacon!" said the tramp again. "Get up on them graceful limbs, *if* you please."

I guess he thought himself safe from attack by a woman. At any rate, he bent over as if to grab Mifflin by the neck. I saw my chance and jumped on him from behind. I am heavy, as I have said, and he sprawled on the ground. My doubts as to the pistol being loaded were promptly dissolved, for it went off like a cannon. Nobody was in front of it, however, and Mifflin was on his feet like a flash. He had the ruffian by the throat and kicked the weapon out of his hand. I ran to seize it.

"You son of Satan!" said the valiant Redbeard. "Thought you could bully us, did you? Miss McGill, you were as quick as Joan of Arc. Hand me the pistol, please."

I gave it to him, and he shoved it under the hobo's nose.

"Now," he said, "take off that rag around your neck."

The rag was an old red handkerchief, inconceivably soiled. The tramp removed it, grumbling and whining. Mifflin gave me the pistol to hold while he tied our prisoner's wrists together. In the meantime we heard a shout from the quarry. The three vagabonds were gazing up in great excitement.

"You tell those fashion plates down there," said Mifflin, as he knotted the tramp's hands together, "that if they make any fight I'll shoot them like crows." His voice was cold and savage and he seemed quite master of the situation, but I must confess I wondered how we could handle four of them.

The greasy ruffian shouted down to his pals in the quarry, but I did not hear what he said, as just then the Professor asked me to keep our captive covered while he got a stick. I stood with the pistol pointed at his head while Mifflin ran back into the birchwood to cut a cudgel.

The tramp's face became the colour of the under side of a fried egg as he looked into the muzzle of his own gun.

"Say, lady," he pleaded, "that gun goes off

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awful easy, point her somewhere else or you'll croak me by mistake."

I thought a good scare wouldn't do him any harm and kept the barrel steadily on him.

The rascals down below seemed debating what to do. I don't know whether they were armed or not; but probably they imagined that there were more than two of us. At all events, by the time Miffin came back with a stout birch staff they were hustling out of the quarry on the lower side. The Professor swore, and looked as if he would gladly give chase, but he refrained.

"Here, you," he said in crisp tones to the tramp, "march on ahead of us, down to the quarry."

The fat ruffian shambled awkwardly down the trail. We had to make quite a détour to get into the quarry, and by the time we reached there the other three tramps had got clean away. I was not sorry, to tell the truth. I thought the Professor had had enough scrapping for one twenty-four hours.

Peg whinneyed loudly as she saw us coming, but Bock was not in sight.

"What have you done with the dog, you swine?" said Mifflin. "If you've hurt him I'll make you pay with your own hide."

Our prisoner was completely cowed. "No, boss, we ain't hurt the dog," he fawned. "We tied him up so he couldn't bark, that's all. He's in the 'bus." And sure enough, by this time we could hear smothered yelping and whining from Parnassus.

I hurried to open the door, and there was Bock, his jaws tied together with a rope-end. He bounded out and made super-canine efforts to express his joy at seeing the Professor again. He paid very little attention to me.

"Well," said Mifflin, after freeing the dog's muzzle, and with difficulty restraining him from burying his teeth in the tramp's shin, "what shall we do with this heroic specimen of manhood? Shall we cart him over to the jail in Port Vigor, or shall we let him go?"

The tramp burst into a whining appeal that was almost funny, it was so abject. The Professor cut it short.

"I ought to pack you into quod," he said. "Are you the Phœbus Apollo I scuffled with

down the lane last night? Was it you skulking around this wagon then?"

"No, boss, that was Splitlip Sam, honest to Gawd it was. He come back, boss; said he'd been fightin' with a cat-o'-mountain! Say, boss, you sure hit him hard. One of his lamps is a pudding! Boss, I'll swear I ain't had nothin' to do with it."

"I don't like your society," said the Professor, "and I'm going to turn you loose. I'm going to count ten, and if you're not out of this quarry by then, I'll shoot. And if I see you again I'll skin you alive. Now get out!"

He cut the knotted handkerchief in two. The hobo needed no urging. He spun on his heel and fled like a rabbit. The Professor watched him go, and as the fat, ungainly figure burst through a hedge and disappeared he fired the revolver into the air to frighten him still more. Then he tossed the weapon into the pool near by.

"Well, Miss McGill," he said with a chuckle, "if you like to undertake breakfast, I'll fix up Peg." And he drew the horse-shoe from his pocket once more.

A brief inspection of Parnassus satisfied me that the thieves had not had time to do any real damage. They had got out most of the eatables and spread them on a flat rock in preparation for a feast; and they had tracked a good deal of mud into the van; but otherwise I could see nothing amiss. So while Mifflin busied himself with Peg's foot it was easy for me to get a meal under way. I found a gush of clean water trickling down the face of the rock. There were still some eggs and bread and cheese in the little cupboard, and an unopened tin of condensed milk. I gave Peg her nose bag of oats, and fed Bock who was frisking about in high spirits. By that time the shoeing was done, and the Professor and I sat down to an improvised meal. I was beginning to feel as if this gipsy existence were the normal course of my life.

"Well, Professor," I said, as I handed him a cup of coffee and a plate of scrambled eggs and cheese, "for a man who slept in a wet haystack, you acquit yourself with excellent valour."

"Old Parnassus is quite a stormy petrel," he said. "I used to think the chief difficulty

in writing a book would be to invent things to happen, but if I were to sit down and write the adventures I'd had with her it would be a regular *Odyssey*."

"How about Peg's foot?" I asked. "Can she travel on it?"

"It'll be all right if you go easy. I've scraped out the injured part and put the shoe back. I keep a little kit of tools under the van for emergencies of all sorts."

It was chilly, and we didn't dawdle over our meal. I only made a feint of eating, as I had had a little breakfast before, and also as the events of the last few hours had left me rather restless. I wanted to get Parnassus out on the highway again, to jog along in the sun and think things over. The quarry was a desolate, forbidding place anyway. But before we left we explored the cave where the tramps had been preparing to make themselves comfortable for the winter. It was not really a cave, but only a shaft into the granite cliff. A screen of ever-green boughs protected the opening against the weather, and inside were piles of sacking that had evidently been used as beds, and many old

grocery boxes for tables and chairs. It amused me to notice a cracked fragment of mirror balanced on a corner of rock. Even these ragamuffins apparently were not totally unconscious of personal appearance. I seized the opportunity, while the Professor was giving Peg's foot a final look, to rearrange my hair, which was emphatically a sight. I hardly think Andrew would have recognized me that morning.

We led Peg up the steep incline, back into the lane where I had strayed, and at length we reached the main road again. Here I began to lay down the law to Redbeard.

"Now look here, Professor," I said, "I'm not going to have you tramp all the way back to Port Vigor. After the night you've had you need a rest. You just climb into that Parnassus and lie down for a good snooze. I'll drive you into Woodbridge and you can take your train there. Now you get right into that bunk. I'll sit out here and drive."

He demurred, but without much emphasis. I think the little fool was just about fagged out, and no wonder. I was a trifle groggy myself.

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In the end he was quite docile. He climbed into the van, took off his boots, and lay down under a blanket. Bock followed him, and I think they both fell asleep on the instant. I got on the front seat and took the reins. I didn't let Peg go more quickly than a walk as I wanted to spare her sore foot.

My, what a morning that was after the rain! The road ran pretty close to the shore, and every now and then I could catch a glimpse of the water. The air was keen—not just the ordinary, unnoticed air that we breathe in and out and don't think about, but a sharp and tingling essence, as strong in the nostrils as camphor or ammonia. The sun seemed focussed upon Parnassus, and we moved along the white road in a flush of golden light. The flat fronds of the cedars swayed gently in the salty air, and for the first time in ten years, I should think, I began amusing myself by selecting words to describe the goodness of the morning. I even imagined myself writing a description of it, as if I were Andrew or Thoreau. The crazy little Professor had inoculated me with his literary bug, I guess.

And then I did a dishonourable thing. Just by chance I put my hand into the little pocket beside the seat where Mifflin kept a few odds and ends. I meant to have another look at that card of his with the poem on it. And there I found a funny, battered little notebook, evidently forgotten. On the cover was written, in ink, "Thoughts on the Present Discontents." That title seemed vaguely familiar. I seemed to recall something of the kind from my school days—more than twenty years ago, goodness me! Of course if I had been honourable I wouldn't have looked into it. But in a kind of quibbling self-justification I recalled that I had bought Parnassus and all it contained, "lock, stock, barrel and bung" as Andrew used to say. And so. . . .

The notebook was full of little jottings, written in pencil in the Professor's small, precise hand. The words were rubbed and soiled, but plainly legible. I read this:

*I don't suppose Bock or Peg get lonely, but by the bones of Ben Gunn, I do. Seems silly when Herrick and Hans Andersen and Tennyson and*

*Thoreau and a whole wagonload of other good fellows are riding at my back. I can hear them all talking as we trundle along. But books aren't a substantial world after all, and every now and then we get hungry for some closer, more human relationships. I've been totally alone now for eight years—except for Runt, and he might be dead and never say so. This wandering about is fine in its way, but it must come to an end some day. A man needs to put down a root somewhere to be really happy.*

*What absurd victims of contrary desires we are ! If a man is settled in one place he yearns to wander; when he wanders he yearns to have a home. And yet how bestial is content—all the great things in life are done by discontented people.*

*There are three ingredients in the good life: learning, earning, and yearning. A man should be learning as he goes; and he should be earning bread for himself and others; and he should be yearning, too: yearning to know the unknowable.*

*What a fine old poem is "The Pulley" by George Herbert ! Those Elizabethan fellows knew how to write ! They were marred perhaps by their idea that poems must be "witty." (Remem-*

ber how Bacon said that reading poets makes one witty? There he gave a clue to the literature of his time.) Their fantastic puns and conceits are rather out of our fashion nowadays. But Lord! the root of the matter was in them! How gallantly, how reverently, they tackle the problems of life!

When God at first made man (says George Herbert) he had a "glass of blessings standing by." So He pours on man all the blessings in His reservoir: strength, beauty, wisdom, honour, pleasure—and then He refrains from giving him the last of them, which is rest., i. e., contentment. God sees that if man is contented he will never win his way to Him. Let man be restless, so that

"If goodness lead him not, yet weariness  
May toss him to My breast."

Some day I shall write a novel on that theme, and call it "The Pulley." In this tragic, restless world there must be some place where at last we can lay our heads and be at rest. Some people call it death. Some call it God.

My ideal of a man is not the Omar who wants to shatter into bits this sorry scheme of things, and

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*then remould it nearer to the heart's desire. Old Omar was a coward, with his silk pajamas and his glass of wine. The real man is George Herbert's "seasoned timber"—the fellow who does handily and well whatever comes to him. Even if it's only shovelling coal into a furnace he can balance the shovel neatly, swing the coal square on the fire and not spill it on the floor. If it's only splitting kindling or running a trolley car he can make a good, artistic job of it. If it's only writing a book or peeling potatoes he can put into it the best he has. Even if he's only a bald-headed old fool over forty selling books on a country road, he can make an ideal of it. Good old Parnassus! It's a great game. . . . I think I'll have to give her up soon, though: I must get that book of mine written. But Parnassus has been a true glass of blessings to me.*

There was much more in the notebook; indeed it was half full of jotted paragraphs, memoranda, and scraps of writing—poems I believe some of them were—but I had seen enough. It seemed as if I had stumbled unawares on the pathetic, brave, and lonely heart of the

little man. I'm a commonplace creature, I'm afraid, insensible to many of the deeper things in life, but every now and then, like all of us, I come face to face with something that thrills me. I saw how this little, red-bearded pedlar was like a cake of yeast in the big, heavy dough of humanity: how he travelled about trying to fulfil in his own way his ideals of beauty. I felt almost motherly toward him: I wanted to tell him that I understood him. And in a way I felt ashamed of having run away from my own homely tasks, my kitchen and my hen yard and dear old, hot-tempered, absent-minded Andrew. I fell into a sober mood. As soon as I was alone, I thought, I would sell Parnassus and hurry back to the farm. That was my job, that was my glass of blessings. What was I doing—a fat, middle-aged woman—trapesing along the roads with a cartload of books I didn't understand?

I slipped the little notebook back into its hiding-place. I would have died rather than let the Professor know I had seen it.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

**W**E WERE coming into Woodbridge; and I was just wondering whether to wake the Professor when the little window behind me slid back and he stuck his head out.

"Hello!" he said. "I think I must have been asleep!"

"Well, I should hope so," I said. "You needed it."

Indeed he looked much better, and I was relieved to see it. I had been really afraid he would be ill after sleeping out all night, but I guess he was tougher than I thought. He joined me on the seat, and we drove into the town. While he went to the station to ask about the trains I had a fine time selling books. I was away from the locality where I was known, and had no shyness in attempting to imitate Miffin's methods. I even went him one better by going

into a hardware store where I bought a large dinner bell. This I rang lustily until a crowd gathered, then I put up the flaps and displayed my books. As a matter of fact, I sold only one, but I enjoyed myself none the less.

By and by Mifflin reappeared. I think he had been to a barber: at any rate he looked very spry: he had bought a clean collar and a flowing tie of a bright electric blue which really suited him rather well.

"Well," he said, "the Sage is going to get back at me for that punch on the nose! I've been to the bank to cash your check. They telephoned over to Redfield, and apparently your brother has stopped payment on it. It's rather awkward: they seem to think I'm a crook."

I was furious. What right had Andrew to do that?

"The brute!" I said. "What on earth shall I do?"

"I suggest that you telephone to the Redfield Bank," he said, "and countermand your brother's instructions — that is, unless you think you've made a mistake? I don't want to take advantage of you."

"Nonsense!" I said. "I'm not going to let Andrew spoil my holiday. That's always his way: if he gets an idea into his head he's like a mule. I'll telephone to Redfield, and then we'll go to see the bank here."

We put Parnassus up at the hotel, and I went to the telephone. I was thoroughly angry at Andrew, and tried to get him on the wire first. But Sabine Farm didn't answer. Then I telephoned to the bank in Redfield, and got Mr. Shirley. He's the cashier, and I know him well. I guess he recognized my voice, for he made no objection when I told him what I wanted.

"Now you telephone to the bank in Woodbridge," I said, "and tell them to let Mr. Miffin have the money. I'll go there with him to identify him. Will that be all right?"

"Perfectly," he said. The deceitful little snail! If I had only known what he was concocting!

Miffin said there was a train at three o'clock which he could take. We stopped at a little lunch room for a bite to eat, then he went again to the bank, and I with him. We asked the cashier whether they had had a message from Redfield.

"Yes," he said. "We've just heard." And he looked at me rather queerly.

"Are you Miss McGill?" he said.

"I am," I said.

"Will you just step this way a moment?" he asked politely.

He led me into a little sitting-room and asked me to sit down. I supposed that he was going to get some paper for me to sign, so I waited quite patiently for several minutes. I had left the Professor at the cashier's window, where they would give him his money.

I waited some time, and finally I got tired of looking at the Life Insurance calendars. Then I happened to glance out of the window. Surely that was the Professor, just disappearing round the corner with another man?

I returned to the cashier's desk.

"What's the matter?" I said. "Your mahogany furniture is charming, but I'm tired of it. Do I have to sit here any longer? And where's Mr. Mifflin? Did he get his money?"

The cashier was a horrid little creature with side whiskers.

"I'm sorry you had to wait, Madam," he said. "The transaction is just concluded. We gave Mr. Mifflin what was due him. There is no need for you to stay longer."

I thought this was very extraordinary. Surely the Professor would not leave without saying good-bye? However, I noticed that the clock said three minutes to three, so I thought that perhaps he had had to run to catch his train. He was such a strange little man, anyway. . . .

Well, I went back to the hotel, quite a little upset by this sudden parting. At least I was glad the little man had got his money all right. Probably he would write from Brooklyn, but of course I wouldn't get the letter till I returned to the farm as that was the only address he would have. Perhaps that wouldn't be so long after all; but I did not feel like going back now, when Andrew had been so horrid.

I drove Parnassus on the ferry, and we crossed the river. I felt lost and disagreeable. Even the fresh movement through the air gave me no pleasure. Bock whined dismally inside the van.

It didn't take me long to discover that Parnassing all alone had lost some of its charms. I missed the Professor: missed his abrupt, direct way of saying things, and his whimsical wit. And I was annoyed by his skipping off without a word of good-bye. It didn't seem natural. I partially appeased my irritation by stopping at a farmhouse on the other side of the river and selling a cook book. Then I started along the road for Bath—about five miles farther on. Peg's foot didn't seem to bother her so I thought it would be safe to travel that far before stopping for the night. Counting up the days (with some difficulty: it seemed as though I had been away from home a month), I remembered that this was Saturday night. I thought I would stay in Bath over Sunday and get a good rest. We jogged sedately along the road, and I got out a copy of *Vanity Fair*. I was so absorbed in Becky Sharp that I wouldn't even interrupt myself to sell books at the houses we passed. I think reading a good book makes one modest. When you see the marvellous insight into human nature which a truly great book shows, it is bound

to make you feel small—like looking at the Dipper on a clear night, or seeing the winter sunrise when you go out to collect the morning eggs. And anything that makes you feel small is mighty good for you.

“What do you mean by a great book?” said the Professor—I mean, I imagined him saying it. It seemed to me as if I could see him sitting there, with his corn-cob pipe in his hand and that quizzical little face of his looking sharply at me. Somehow, talking with the Professor had made me think. He was as good as one of those Scranton correspondence courses, I do believe, and no money to pay for postage.

Well, I said to the Professor—to myself I mean—let’s see: what *is* a good book? I don’t mean books like Henry James’s (he’s Andrew’s great idol. It always seemed to me that he had a kind of rush of words to the head and never stopped to sort them out properly). A good book ought to have something simple about it. And, like Eve, it ought to come from somewhere near the third rib: there ought to be a heart beating in it. A story that’s all forehead doesn’t amount to much. Anyway,

it'll never get over at a Dorcas meeting. That was the trouble with Henry James. Andrew talked so much about him that I took one of his books to read aloud at our sewing circle over at Redfield. Well, after one try we had to fall back on "Pollyanna."

I haven't been doing chores and running a farmhouse for fifteen years without getting some ideas about life—and even about books. I wouldn't set my literary views up against yours, Professor (I was still talking to Mifflin in my mind), no, nor even against Andrew's—but as I say, I've got some ideas of my own. I've learned that honest work counts in writing books just as much as it does in washing dishes. I guess Andrew's books must be some good after all because he surely does mull over them without end. I can forgive his being a shiftless farmer so long as he really does his literary chores up to the hilt. A man can be slack in everything else, if he does one thing as well as he possibly can. And I guess it won't matter my being an ignoramus in literature so long as I'm rated A 1 in the kitchen. That's what I used to think as I polished and scoured and scrubbed and

dusted and swept and then set about getting dinner. If I ever sat down to read for ten minutes the cat would get into the custard. No woman in the country sits down for fifteen consecutive minutes between sunrise and sunset, anyway, unless she has half a dozen servants. And nobody knows anything about literature unless he spends most of his life sitting down. So there you are.

The cultivation of philosophic reflection was a new experience for me. Peg ambled along contentedly and the dog trailed under Parnassus where I had tied him. I read *Vanity Fair* and thought about all sorts of things. Once I got out to pick some scarlet maple leaves that attracted me. The motors passing annoyed me with their dust and noise, but by and by one of them stopped, looked at my outfit curiously, and then asked to see some books. I put up the flaps for them and we pulled off to one side of the road and had a good talk. They bought two or three books, too.

By the time I neared Bath the hands of my watch pointed to supper. I was still a bit shy of Miffin's scheme of stopping overnight at

farmhouses, so I thought I'd go right into the town and look for a hotel. The next day was Sunday, so it seemed reasonable to give the horse a good rest and stay in Bath two nights. The Hominy House looked clean and old fashioned, and the name amused me, so in I went. It was a kind of high-class boarding-house, with mostly old women around. It looked to me almost literary and Elbert Hubbardish compared to the Grand Central in Shelby. The folks there stared at me somewhat suspiciously and I half thought they were going to say they didn't take pedlars; but when I flashed a new five-dollar bill at the desk I got good service. A five-dollar bill is a patent of nobility in New England.

My! how I enjoyed that creamed chicken on toast, and buckwheat cakes with syrup! After you get used to cooking all your own grub, a meal off some one else's stove is the finest kind of treat. After supper I was all prepared to sit out on the porch with my sweater on and give a rocking chair a hot box, but then I remembered that it was up to me to carry on the traditions of Parnassus. I was there to spread the gospel

of good books. I got to thinking how the Professor never shirked carrying on his campaign, and I determined that I would be worthy of the cause.

When I think back about the experience, it seems pretty crazy, but at the time I was filled with a kind of evangelistic zeal. I thought if I was going to try to sell books I might as well have some fun out of it. Most of the old ladies were squatting about in the parlour, knitting or reading or playing cards. In the smoking-room I could see two dried-up men. Mrs. Hominy, the manager of the place, was sitting at her desk behind a brass railing, going over accounts with a quill pen. I thought that the house probably hadn't had a shock since Walt Whitman wrote "Leaves of Grass." In a kind of do-or-die spirit I determined to give them a rouse.

In the dining-room I had noticed a huge dinner bell that stood behind the door. I stepped in there, and got it. Standing in the big hall I began ringing it as hard as I could shake my arm.

You might have thought it was a fire alarm. Mrs. Hominy dropped her pen in horror. The

colonial dames in the parlour came to life and ran into the hall like cockroaches. In a minute I had gathered quite a respectable audience. It was up to me to do the spellbinding.

"Friends," I said (unconsciously imitating the Professor's tricks of the trade, I guess), "This bell which generally summons you to the groaning board now calls you to a literary repast. With the permission of the management, and with apologies for disturbing your tranquillity, I will deliver a few remarks on the value of good books. I see that several of you are fond of reading, so perhaps the topic will be congenial?"

They gazed at me about as warmly as a round of walnut sundaes.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," I continued, "of course you remember the story of Abe Lincoln when he said, 'if you call a leg a tail, how many tails has a dog?' 'Five,' you answer. Wrong; because, as Mr. Lincoln said, calling a leg a tail. . . ."

I still think it was a good beginning. But that was as far as I got. Mrs. Hominy came out of her trance, hastened from the cage, and

grabbed my arm. She was quite red with anger.

"Really!" she said. "Well, really! . . . I must ask you to continue this in some other place. We do not allow commercial travellers in this house."

And within fifteen minutes they had hitched up Peg and asked me to move on. Indeed I was so taken aback by my own zeal that I could hardly protest. In a kind of daze I found myself at the Moose Hotel, where they assured me that they catered to mercantile people. I went straight to my room and fell asleep as soon as I reached the straw mattress.

That was my first and only public speech.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

**T**HE next day was Sunday, October sixth. I well remember the date.

I woke up as chipper as any Robert W. Chambers heroine. All my doubts and depressions of the evening before had fled, and I was single-heartedly delighted with the world and everything in it. The hotel was a poor place, but it would have taken more than that to mar my composure. I had a bitterly cold bath in a real country tin tub, and then eggs and pancakes for breakfast. At the table was a drummer who sold lightning rods, and several other travelling salesmen. I'm afraid my conversation was consciously modelled along the line of what the Professor would have said if he had been there, but at any rate I got along swimmingly. The travelling men, after a moment or two of embarrassed diffidence, treated me quite as one of themselves and

asked me about my "line" with interest. I described what I was doing and they all said they envied me my freedom to come and go independently of trains. We talked cheerfully for a long time, and almost without intending to, I started preaching about books. In the end they insisted on my showing them Parnassus. We all went out to the stable, where the van was quartered, and they browsed over the shelves. Before I knew it I had sold five dollars' worth, although I had decided not to do any business at all on Sunday. But I couldn't refuse to sell them the stuff as they all seemed so keen on getting something really good to read. One man kept on talking about Harold Bell Wright, but I had to admit that I hadn't heard of him. Evidently the Professor hadn't stocked any of his works. I was tickled to see that after all little Redbeard didn't know *everything* about literature.

After that I debated whether to go to church or to write letters. Finally I decided in favour of the letters. First I tackled Andrew. I wrote:

The Moose Hotel, Bath,  
Sunday morning.

DEAR ANDREW:

It seems absurd to think that it's only three days since I left Sabine Farm. Honestly, more has happened to me in these three days than in three years at home.

I'm sorry that you and Mr. Mifflin disagreed but I quite understood your feelings. But I'm very angry that you should have tried to stop that check I gave him. It was none of your business, Andrew. I telephoned Mr. Shirley and made him send word to the bank in Woodbridge to give Mifflin the money. Mr. Mifflin did not swindle me into buying Parnassus. I did it of my own free will. If you want to know the truth, it was your fault! I bought it because I was scared *you* would if I didn't. And I didn't want to be left all alone on the farm from now till Thanksgiving while you went off on another trip. So I decided to do the thing myself. I thought I'd see how you would like being left all alone to run the house. I thought it'd be pretty nice for me to get things off my mind a while and have an adventure of my own.

Now, Andrew, here are some directions for you:

1. Don't forget to feed the chickens twice a day, and collect *all* the eggs. There's a nest behind the wood pile, and some of the Wyandottes have been laying under the ice house.

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2. Don't let Rosie touch grandmother's blue china, because she'll break it as sure as fate if she lays her big, thick Swedish fingers on it.

3. Don't forget your warmer underwear. The nights are getting chilly.

4. I forgot to put the cover on the sewing machine. Please do that for me or it'll get all dusty.

5. Don't let the cat run loose in the house at night: he always breaks something.

6. Send your socks and anything else that needs darning over to Mrs. McNally, she can do it for you.

7. Don't forget to feed the pigs.

8. Don't forget to mend the weathervane on the barn.

9. Don't forget to send that barrel of apples over to the cider mill or you won't have any cider to drink when Mr. Decameron comes up to see us later in the fall.

10. Just to make ten commandments, I'll add one more: You might 'phone to Mrs. Collins that the Dorcas will have to meet at some one else's house next week, because I don't know just when I'll get back. I may be away a fortnight more. This is my first holiday in a long time and I'm going to chew it before I swallow it.

The Professor (Mr. Mifflin, I mean) has gone back to Brooklyn to work on his book. I'm sorry you and he had to mix it up on the high road like a

couple of hooligans. He's a nice little man and you'd like him if you got to know him.

I'm spending Sunday in Bath: to-morrow I'm going on toward Hastings. I've sold five dollars' worth of books this morning even if it is Sunday.

Your affte sister

HELEN MCGILL.

P.S. Don't forget to clean the separator after using it, or it'll get in a fearful state.

After writing to Andrew I thought I would send a message to the Professor. I had already written him a long letter in my mind, but somehow when I began putting it on paper a sort of awkwardness came over me. I didn't know just how to begin. I thought how much more fun it would be if he were there himself and I could listen to him talk. And then, while I was writing the first few sentences, some of the drummers came back into the room.

"Thought you'd like to see a Sunday paper," said one of them.

I picked up the newspaper with a word of thanks and ran an eye over the headlines. The ugly black letters stood up before me, and my

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heart gave a great contraction. I felt my fingertips turn cold.

### DISASTROUS WRECK ON THE SHORE LINE EXPRESS RUNS INTO OPEN SWITCH

TEN LIVES LOST, AND  
MORE THAN A SCORE INJURED

### FAILURE OF BLOCK SIGNALS

The letters seemed to stand up before me as large as a Malted Milk signboard. With a shuddering apprehension I read the details. Apparently the express that left Providence at four o'clock on Saturday afternoon had crashed into an open siding near Willdon about six o'clock, and collided with a string of freight empties. The baggage car had been demolished and the smoker had turned over and gone down an embankment. There were ten men killed . . . my head swam. Was that the train the Professor had taken? Let me see. He left Woodbridge on a local train at three. He had said the day before that the express left Port

Vigor at five. . . . If he had changed to the express. . . .

In a kind of fascinated horror my eye caught the list of the dead. I ran down the names. Thank God, no, Miffin was not among them. Then I saw the last entry:

UNIDENTIFIED MAN, MIDDLE-AGED.

What if that should be the Professor?

And I suddenly felt dizzy, and for the first time in my life I fainted.

Thank goodness, no one else was in the room. The drummers had gone outside again, and no one heard me flop off the chair. I came to in a moment, my heart whirling like a spinning top. At first I did not realize what was wrong. Then my eye fell on the newspaper again. Feverishly I re-read the account, and the names of the injured, too, which I had missed before. Nowhere was there a name I knew. But the tragic words "unidentified man" danced before my eyes. Oh! if it were the Professor. . . .

In a wave the truth burst upon me. I loved that little man: I loved him, I loved him. He had brought something new into my life, and

his brave, quaint ways had warmed my fat old heart. For the first time, in an intolerable gush of pain, I seemed to know that my life could never again be endurable without him. And now—what was I to do?

How could I learn the truth? Certainly if he *had* been on the train, and had escaped from the wreck unhurt, he would have sent a message to Sabine Farm to let me know. At any rate, that was a possibility. I rushed to the telephone to call up Andrew.

Oh! the agonizing slowness of telephone connections when urgent hurry is needed! My voice shook as I said "Redfield 158 J" to the operator. Throbbing with nervousness I waited to hear the familiar click of the receiver at the other end. I could hear the Redfield switchboard receive the call, and put in the plug to connect with our wire. In imagination I could see the telephone against the wall in the old hallway at Sabine Farm. I could see the soiled patch of plaster where Andrew rests his elbow when he talks into the 'phone, and the place where he jots numbers down in pencil and I rub them off with bread crumbs. I

could see Andrew coming out of the sitting-room to answer the bell. And then the operator said carelessly, "Doesn't answer." My forehead was wet as I came out of the booth.

I hope I may never have to re-live the horrors of the next hour. In spite of my bluff and hearty ways, in times of trouble I am as reticent as a clam. I was determined to hide my agony and anxiety from the well-meaning people of the Moose Hotel. I hurried to the railway station to send a telegram to the Professor's address in Brooklyn, but found the place closed. A boy told me it would not be open until the afternoon. From a drugstore I called "information" in Wilddon, and finally got connected with some undertaker to whom the Wilddon operator referred me. A horrible, condoling voice (have you ever talked to an undertaker over the telephone?) answered me that no one by the name of Mifflin had been among the dead, but admitted that there was one body still unidentified. He used one ghastly word that made me shudder—*unrecognizable*. I rang off.

I knew then for the first time the horror of

loneliness. I thought of the poor little man's notebook that I had seen. I thought of his fearless and lovable ways—of his pathetic little tweed cap, of the missing button of his jacket, of the bungling darns on his frayed sleeve. It seemed to me that heaven could mean nothing more than to roll creaking along country roads, in Parnassus, with the Professor beside me on the seat. What if I had known him only—how long was it? He had brought the splendour of an ideal into my humdrum life. And now—had I lost it forever? Andrew and the farm seemed faint and far away. I was a homely old woman, mortally lonely and helpless. In my perplexity I walked to the outskirts of the village and burst into tears.

Finally I got a grip on myself again. I am not ashamed to say that I now admitted frankly what I had been hiding from myself. I was in love—in love with a little, red-bearded bookseller who seemed to me more splendid than Sir Galahad. And I vowed that if he would have me, I would follow him to the other end of nowhere.

I walked back to the hotel. I thought I

would make one more try to get Andrew on the telephone. My whole soul quivered when at last I heard the receiver click.

"Hello?" said Andrew's voice.

"Oh, Andrew," I said, "this is Helen."

"Where are you?" (His voice sounded cross.)

"Andrew, is there any—any message from Mr. Mifflin? That wreck yesterday—he might have been on that train—I've been so frightened; do you think he was—hurt?"

"Stuff and nonsense," said Andrew. "If you want to know about Mifflin, he's in jail in Port Vigor."

And then I think Andrew must have been surprised. I began to laugh and cry simultaneously, and in my agitation I set down the receiver.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

**M**Y FIRST impulse was to hide myself in some obscure corner where I could vent my feelings without fear or favour. I composed my face as well as I could before leaving the 'phone booth; then I sidled across the lobby and slipped out of the side door. I found my way into the stable, where good old Peg was munching in her stall. The fine, homely smell of horseflesh and long-worn harness leather went right to my heart, and while Bock frisked at my knees I laid my head on Peg's neck and cried. I think that fat old mare understood me. She was as tubby and prosaic and middle-aged as I—but she loved the Professor.

Suddenly Andrew's words echoed again in my mind. I had barely heeded them before, in the great joy of my relief, but now their significance came to me. "In jail." The Professor in jail! That was the meaning of his strange disappear-

ance at Woodbridge. That little brute of a man Shirley must have telephoned from Redfield, and when the Professor came to the Woodbridge bank to cash that check they had arrested him. That was why they had shoved me into that mahogany sitting-room. Andrew must be behind this. The besotted old fool! My face burned with anger and humiliation.

I never knew before what it means to be really infuriated. I could feel my brain tingle. The Professor in jail! The gallant, chivalrous little man, penned up with hoboos and sneak thieves suspected of being a crook . . . as if I couldn't take care of myself! What did they think he was, anyway? A kidnapper?

Instantly I decided I would hurry back to Port Vigor without delay. If Andrew had had the Professor locked up, it could only be on the charge of defrauding me. Certainly it couldn't be for giving him a bloody nose on the road from Shelby. And if I appeared to deny the charge, surely they would have to let Mr. Mifflin go.

I believe I must have been talking to myself in Peg's stall—at any rate, just at this moment the stableman appeared and looked very bewildered

when he saw me, with flushed face and in obvious excitement, talking to the horse. I asked him when was the next train to Port Vigor.

"Well, ma'am," he said, "they say that all the local trains is held up till the wreck at Willdon's cleared away. This being Sunday, I don't think you'll get anything from here until to-morrow morning."

I reflected. It wasn't so awfully far back to Port Vigor. A flivver from the local garage could spin me back there in a couple of hours at the most. But somehow it seemed more fitting to go to the Professor's rescue in his own Parnassus, even if it would take longer to get there. To tell the truth, while I was angry and humiliated at the thought of his being put in jail by Andrew, I couldn't help, deep down within me, being rather thankful. Suppose he had been in the wreck? The Sage of Redfield had played the part of Providence after all. And if I set out right away with Parnassus, I could get to Port Vigor—well, by Monday morning anyway.

The good people of the Moose Hotel were genuinely surprised at the hurry with which I

dispatched my lunch. But I gave them no explanations. Goodness knows, my head was full of other thoughts and the apple sauce might have been asbestos. You know, a woman only falls in love once in her life, and if it waits until she's darn near forty—well, it *takes*! You see I hadn't even been vaccinated against it by girlish flirtations. I began to be a governess when I was just a kid, and a governess doesn't get many chances to be skittish. So now when it came, it hit me hard. That's when a woman finds herself—when she's in love. I don't care if she *is* old or fat or homely or prosy. She feels that little flutter under her ribs and she drops from the tree like a ripe plum. I didn't care if Roger Mifflin and I were as odd a couple as old Dr. Johnson and his wife, I only knew one thing: that when I saw that little red devil again I was going to be all his—if he'd have me. That's why the old Moose Hotel in Bath is always sacred to me. That's where I learned that life still held something fresh for me—something better than baking champlain biscuits for Andrew.

. . . . .

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That Sunday was one of those mellow, golden days that we New Englanders get in October. The year really begins in March, as every farmer knows, and by the end of September or the beginning of October the season has come to its perfect, ripened climax. There are a few days when the world seems to hang still in a dreaming, sweet hush, at the very fulness of the fruit before the decline sets in. I have no words (like Andrew) to describe it, but every autumn for years I have noticed it. I remember that sometimes at the farm I used to lean over the wood pile for a moment just before supper to watch those purple October sunsets. I would hear the sharp ting of Andrew's little typewriter bell as he was working in his study. And then I would try to swallow down within me the beauty and wistfulness of it all, and run back to mash the potatoes.

Peg drew Parnassus along the backward road with a merry little rumble. I think she knew we were going back to the Professor. Bock careered mightily along the wayside. And I had much time for thinking. On the whole, I was glad; for I had much to ponder. An adventure

that had started as a mere lark or whim had now become for me the very gist of life itself. I was fanciful, I guess, and as romantic as a young hen, but by the bones of George Eliot, I'm sorry for the woman that never has a chance to be fanciful. Miffin was in jail; aye, but he might have been dead and—*unrecognizable!* My heart refused to be altogether sad. I was on my way to deliver him from durance vile. There seemed a kinship between the season and myself, I mused, seeing the goldenrod turning bronze and droopy along the way. Here was I, in the full fruition of womanhood, on the verge of my decline into autumn, and lo! by the grace of God, I had found my man, my master. He had touched me with his own fire and courage. I didn't care what happened to Andrew, or to Sabine Farm, or to anything else in the world. Here were my hearth and my home—Parnassus, or wherever Roger should pitch his tent. I dreamed of crossing the Brooklyn Bridge with him at dusk, watching the skyscrapers etched against a burning sky. I believed in calling things by their true names. Ink is ink, even if the bottle is marked "commercial fluid." I

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didn't try to blink the fact that I was in love. In fact, I gloried in it. As Parnassus rolled along the road, and the scarlet maple leaves eddied gently down in the blue October air, I made up a kind of chant which I called

### *Hymn for a Middle-Aged Woman (Fat) Who Has Fallen into Love*

*O God, I thank Thee who sent this great adventure my way! I am grateful to have come out of the barren land of spinsterhood, seeing the glory of a love greater than myself. I thank Thee for teaching me that mixing, and kneading, and baking are not all that life holds for me. Even if he doesn't love me, God, I shall always be his.*

I was crooning some such babble as this to myself when, near Woodbridge, I came upon a big, shiny motor car stranded by the roadside. Several people, evidently intelligent and well-to-do, sat under a tree while their chauffeur fussed with a tire. I was so absorbed in my own thoughts that I think I should have gone by without paying them much heed, but suddenly I remembered the Professor's creed—to

preach the gospel of books in and out of season. Sunday or no Sunday, I thought I could best honour Mifflin by acting on his own principle. I pulled up by the side of the road.

I noticed the people turn to one another in a kind of surprise, and whisper something. There was an elderly man with a lean, hard-worked face; a stout woman, evidently his wife; and two young girls and a man in golfing clothes. Somehow the face of the older man seemed familiar. I wondered whether he were some literary friend of Andrew's whose photo I had seen.

Bock stood by the wheel with his long, curly tongue running in and out over his teeth. I hesitated a moment, thinking just how to phrase my attack, when the elderly gentleman called out:

"Where's the Professor?"

I was beginning to realize that Mifflin was indeed a public character.

"Heavens!" I said. "Do you know him, too?"

"Well, I should think so," he said. "Didn't he come to see me last spring about an appropria-

tion for school libraries, and wouldn't leave till I'd promised to do what he wanted! He stayed the night with us and we talked literature till four o'clock in the morning. Where is he now? Have you taken over Parnassus?"

"Just at present," I said, "Mr. Mifflin is in the jail at Port Vigor."

The ladies gave little cries of astonishment, and the gentleman himself (I had sized him up as a school commissioner or something of that sort) seemed not less surprised.

"In jail!" he said. "What on earth for? Has he sandbagged somebody for reading Nick Carter and Bertha M. Clay? That's about the only crime he'd be likely to commit."

"He's supposed to have cozened me out of four hundred dollars," I said, "and my brother has had him locked up. But as a matter of fact he wouldn't swindle a hen out of a new-laid egg. I bought Parnassus of my own free will. I'm on my way to Port Vigor now to get him out. Then I'm going to ask him to marry me—if he will. It's not leap year, either."

He looked at me, his thin, lined face working with friendliness. He was a fine-looking man—

short, gray hair brushed away from a broad, brown forehead. I noticed his rich, dark suit and the spotless collar. This was a man of breeding, evidently.

"Well, Madam," he said, "any friend of the Professor is a friend of ours." (His wife and the girls chimed in with assent.) "If you would like a lift in our car to speed you on your errand, I'm sure Bob here would be glad to drive Parnassus into Port Vigor. Our tire will soon be mended."

The young man assented heartily, but as I said before, I was bent on taking Parnassus back myself. I thought the sight of his own tabernacle would be the best balm for Mifflin's annoying experience. So I refused the offer, and explained the situation a little more fully.

"Well," he said, "then let me help in any way I can." He took a card from his pocket-book and scribbled something on it. "When you get to Port Vigor," he said, "show this at the jail and I don't think you'll have any trouble. I happen to know the people there."

So after a hand-shake all round I went on again, much cheered by this friendly little inci-

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dent. It wasn't till I was some way along the road that I thought of looking at the card he had given me. Then I realized why the man's face had been familiar. The card read quite simply:

RALEIGH STONE STAFFORD

The Executive Mansion,

Darlington.

It was the Governor of the State!

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

I COULDN'T help chuckling, as Parnassus came over the brow of the hill, and I saw the river in the distance once more. How different all this was from my girlhood visions of romance. That has been characteristic of my life all along—it has been full of homely, workaday happenings, and often rather comic in spite of my best resolves to be highbrow and serious. All the same I was something near to tears as I thought of the tragic wreck at Willdon and the grief-laden hearts that must be mourning. I wondered whether the Governor was now returning from Willdon after ordering an inquiry.

On his card he had written: "Please release R. Miffin at once and show this lady all courtesies." So I didn't anticipate any particular trouble. This made me all the more anxious to push on, and after crossing the ferry we halted in Woodbridge only long enough for

supper. I drove past the bank where I had waited in the anteroom, and would have been glad of a chance to horsewhip that sneaking little cashier. I wondered how they had transported the Professor to Port Vigor, and thought ironically that it was only that Saturday morning when he had suggested taking the hoboes to the same jail. Still I do not doubt that his philosophic spirit had made the best of it all.

Woodbridge was as dead as any country town is on Sunday night. At the little hotel where I had supper there was no topic of conversation except the wreck. But the proprietor, when I paid my bill, happened to notice Parnassus in the yard.

"That's the bus that pedlar sold you, ain't it?" he asked with a leer.

"Yes," I said, shortly.

"Goin' back to prosecute him, I guess?" he suggested. "Say, that feller's a devil, believe *me*. When the sheriff tried to put the cuffs on him he gave him a black eye and pretty near broke his jaw. Some scrapper fer a midget!"

My own brave little fighter, I thought, and flushed with pride.

The road back to Port Vigor seemed endless. I was a little nervous, remembering the tramps in Pratt's quarry, but with Bock sitting beside me on the seat I thought it craven to be alarmed. We rumbled gently through the darkness, between aisles of inky pines where the strip of starlight ran like a ribbon overhead, then on the rolling dunes that overlook the water. There was a moon, too, but I was mortally tired and lonely and longed only to see my little Red-beard. Peg was weary, too, and plodded slowly. It must have been midnight before we saw the red and green lights of the railway signals and I knew that Port Vigor was at hand.

I decided to camp where I was. I guided Peg into a field beside the road, hitched her to a fence, and took the dog into the van with me. I was too tired to undress. I fell into the bunk and drew the blankets over me. As I did so, something dropped down behind the bunk with a sharp rap. It was a forgotten corncob pipe of the Professor's, blackened and sooty. I put it under my pillow, and fell asleep.

Monday, October seventh. If this were a novel about some charming, slender, pansy-eyed

girl, how differently I would have to describe the feelings with which I woke the next morning. But these being only a few pages from the life of a fat, New England housewife, I must be candid. I woke feeling dull and sour. The day was gray and cool: faint shreds of mist sifting up from the Sound and a desolate mewling of sea-gulls in the air. I was unhappy, upset, and—yes—shy. Passionately I yearned to run to the Professor, to gather him into my arms, to be alone with him in Parnassus, creaking up some sunny by-road. But his words came back to me: I was nothing to him. What if he didn't love me after all?

I walked across two fields, down to the beach where little waves were slapping against the shingle. I washed my face and hands in salt water. Then I went back to Parnassus and brewed some coffee with condensed milk. I gave Peg and Bock their breakfasts. Then I hitched Peg to the van again, and felt better. As I drove into the town I had to wait at the grade crossing while a wrecking train rumbled past, on its way back from Willdon. That meant that the line was clear again. I watched

the grimy men on the cars, and shuddered to think what they had been doing.

The Vigor county jail lies about a mile out of the town, an ugly, gray stone barracks with a high, spiked wall about it. I was thankful that it was still fairly early in the morning, and I drove through the streets without seeing any one I knew. Finally I reached the gate in the prison wall. Here some kind of a keeper barred my way. "Can't get in, lady," he said. "Yesterday was visitors' day. No more visitors till next month."

"I *must* get in," I said. "You've got a man in there on a false charge."

"So they all say," he retorted, calmly, and spat halfway across the road. "You wouldn't believe any of our boarders had a right to be here if you could hear their friends talk."

I showed him Governor Stafford's card. He was rather impressed by this, and retired into a sentry-box in the wall—to telephone, I suppose.

Presently he came back.

"The sheriff says he'll see you, ma'am. But you'll have to leave this here dynamite caboose

behind." He unlocked a little door in the immense iron gate, and turned me over to another man inside. "Take this here lady to the sheriff," he said.

Some of Vigor county's prisoners must have learned to be pretty good gardeners, for certainly the grounds were in good condition. The grass was green and trimly mowed; there were conventional beds of flowers in very ugly shapes; in the distance I saw a gang of men in striped overalls mending a roadway. The guide led me to an attractive cottage to one side of the main building. There were two children playing outside, and I remember thinking that within the walls of a jail was surely a queer place to bring up youngsters.

But I had other things to think about. I looked up at that grim, gray building. Behind one of those little barred windows was the Professor. I should have been angry at Andrew, but somehow it all seemed a kind of dream. Then I was taken into the hallway of the sheriff's cottage and in a minute I was talking to a big, bull-necked man with a political moustache.

"You have a prisoner here called Roger Mifflin?" I said.

"My dear Madam, I don't keep a list of all our inmates in my head. If you will come to the office we will look up the records."

I showed him the Governor's card. He took it and kept looking at it as though he expected to see the message written there change or fade away. We walked across a strip of lawn to the prison building. There, in a big bare office, he ran over a card index.

"Here we are," he said. "Roger Mifflin; age, 41; face, oval; complexion, florid; hair, red but not much of it; height, 64 inches; weight, stripped, 120; birthmark. . . ."

"Never mind," I said. "That's the man. What's he here for?"

"He's held in default of bail, pending trial. The charge is attempt to defraud one Helen McGill, spinster, age. . . ."

"Rubbish!" I said. "I'm Helen McGill, and the man made no attempt to defraud me."

"The charge was entered and warrant applied for by your brother, Andrew McGill, acting on your behalf."

"I never authorized Andrew to act on my behalf."

"Then do you withdraw the charge?"

"By all means," I said. "I've a great mind to enter a counter-charge against Andrew and have *him* arrested."

"This is all very irregular," said the sheriff, "but if the prisoner is known to the Governor, I suppose there is no alternative. I cannot annul the warrant without some recognizance. According to the laws of this State the next of kin must stand surety for the prisoner's good behaviour after release. There is no next of kin. . . ."

"Surely there is!" I said. "I am the prisoner's next of kin."

"What do you mean?" he said. "In what relationship do you stand to this Roger Mifflin?"

"I intend to marry him just as soon as I can get him away from here."

He burst into a roar of laughter. "I guess there's no stopping you," he said. He pinned the Governor's card to a blue paper on the desk, and began filling in some blanks.

"Well, Miss McGill," he went on, "don't

take away more than one of my prisoners or I'll lose my job. The turnkey will take you up to the cell. I'm exceedingly sorry: you can see that the mistake was none of our fault. Tell the Governor that, will you, when you see him?"

I followed the attendant up two flights of bare, stone stairs, and down a long, white-washed corridor. It was a gruesome place: rows and rows of heavy doors with little, barred windows. I noticed that each door had a combination knob, like a safe. My knees felt awfully shaky.

But it wasn't really so heart-throbby as I had expected. The jailer stopped at the end of a long passageway. He spun the clicking dial, while I waited in a kind of horror. I think I expected to see the Professor with shaved head (they couldn't shave much off his head, poor lamb!) and striped canvas suit, and a ball and chain on his ankle.

The door swung open heavily. There was a narrow, clean little room with a low camp bed, and under the barred window a table strewn with sheets of paper. It was the Professor

in his own clothes, writing busily, with his back toward me. Perhaps he thought it was only an attendant with food, or perhaps he didn't even hear the interruption. I could hear his pen running busily. I might have known you never would get any heroics out of that man! Trust him to make the best of it!

"Lemon sole and a glass of sherry, please, James," said the Professor over his shoulder, and the warder, who evidently had joked with him before, broke into a cackle of laughter.

"A lady to see yer Lordship," he said.

The Professor turned round. His face went quite white. For the first time in my experience of him he seemed to be at a loss for speech.

"Miss—Miss McGill," he stammered. "*You are* the good Samaritan. I'm doing the John Bunyan act, see? Writing in prison. I've really started my book at last. And I find the fellows here know nothing whatever about literature. There isn't even a library in the place."

For the life of me, I couldn't utter the tenderness in my heart with that gorilla of a jailer standing behind us.

Somehow we made our way downstairs, after the Professor had gathered together the sheets of his manuscript. It had already reached formidable proportions, as he had written fifty pages in the thirty-six hours he had been in prison. In the office we had to sign some papers. The sheriff was very apologetic to Miffin, and offered to take him back to town in his car, but I explained that Parnassus was waiting at the gate. The Professor's eyes brightened when he heard that, but I had to hurry him away from an argument about putting good books in prisons. The sheriff walked with us to the gate and there shook hands again.

Peg whickered as we came up to her, and the Professor patted her soft nose. Bock tugged at his chain in a frenzy of joy. At last we were alone.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

I NEVER knew just how it happened. Instead of driving back through Port Vigor, we turned into a side road leading up over the hill and across the heath where the air came fresh and sweet from the sea. The Professor sat very silent, looking about him. There was a grove of birches on the hill, and the sunlight played upon their satin boles.

"It feels good to be out again," he said calmly. "The Sage cannot be so keen a lover of open air as his books would indicate, or he wouldn't be so ready to clap a man into quod. Perhaps I owe him another punch on the nose for that."

"Oh, Roger," I said—and I'm afraid my voice was trembly—"I'm *sorry*. I'm *sorry*."

Not very eloquent, was it? And then, somehow or other, his arm was around me.

"Helen," he said. "Will you marry me?"

I'm not rich, but I've saved up enough to live on. We'll always have Parnassus, and this winter we'll go and live in Brooklyn and write the book. And we'll travel around with Peg, and preach the love of books and the love of human beings. Helen—you're just what I need, God bless you. Will you come with me and make me the happiest bookseller in the world?"

Peg must have been astonished at the length of time she had for cropping the grass, undisturbed. I know that Roger and I sat careless of time. And when he told me that ever since our first afternoon together he had determined to have me, sooner or later, I was the proudest woman in New England. I told Roger about the ghastly wreck, and my agony of apprehension. I think it was the wreck that made us both feel inclined to forgive Andrew.

We had a light luncheon together there on the dunes above the Sound. By taking a short cut over the ridge we struck into the Shelby road without going down into Port Vigor again. Peg pulled us along toward Greenbriar, and we talked as we went.

Perhaps the best of it was that a cold drizzle of rain began to fall as we moved along the hill road. The Professor—as I still call him, by force of habit—curtained in the front of the van with a rubber sheet. Bock hopped up and curled himself against his master's leg. Roger got out his corn-cob pipe, and I sat close to him. In the gathering gloom we plodded along, as happy a trio—or quartet, if you include fat, cheery old Peg—as any on this planet. Summer was over, and we were no longer young, but there were great things before us. I listened to the drip of the rain, and the steady creak of Parnassus on her axles. I thought of my "anthology" of loaves of bread and vowed to bake a million more if Roger wanted me to.

It was after supper time when we got to Greenbriar. Roger had suggested that we take a shorter road that would have brought us through to Redfield sooner, but I begged him to go by way of Shelby and Greenbriar, just as we had come before. I did not tell him why I wanted this. And when finally we came to a halt in front of Kirby's store at the crossroads it was raining heavily and we were ready for a rest.

"Well, sweetheart," said Roger, "shall we go and see what sort of rooms the hotel has?"

"I can think of something better than that," said I. "Let's go up to Mr. Kane and have him marry us. Then we can get back to Sabine Farm afterward, and give Andrew a surprise."

"By the bones of Hymen!" said Roger. "You're right!"

It must have been ten o'clock when we turned in at the red gate of Sabine Farm. The rain had stopped, but the wheels sloshed through mud and water at every turn. The light was burning in the sitting-room, and through the window I could see Andrew bent over his work table. We climbed out, stiff and sore from the long ride. I saw Roger's face set in a comical blend of sternness and humour.

"Well, here goes to surprise the Sage!" he whispered.

We picked our way between puddles and rapped on the door. Andrew appeared, carrying the lamp in one hand. When he saw us he grunted.

"Let me introduce my wife," said Roger.

"Well, I'll be damned," said Andrew.

But Andrew isn't quite so black as I've painted him. When he's once convinced of the error of his ways, he is almost pathetically eager to make up. I remember only one remark in the subsequent conversation, because I was so appalled by the state of everything at Sabine Farm that I immediately set about putting the house to rights. The two men, however, as soon as Parnassus was housed in the barn and the animals under cover, sat down by the stove to talk things over.

"I tell you what," said Andrew—"do whatever you like with your wife; she's too much for me. But I'd like to buy that Parnassus."

"Not on your life!" said the Professor.

WHITE HOUSE INTERIOR

*(March, 1932)*



## WHITE HOUSE INTERIOR

(March, 1932)

WHAT this country needs," said one, "is more sense of individual responsibility."

"What this country needs," said another, quoting Frank Adams's version of the famous *mot*, "is a good five-cent nickel."

The President of the United States was pleased with this, which he had not heard. "Yes," he said, "there's a lot of interest just now in seeing that every dollar does its job." But his own casual suggestion, made in the informality of private conversation, was entirely unexpected. "Perhaps what this country needs is a great poem. Something to lift people out of fear and selfishness. Every once in a while someone catches words out of the air and says what we need to hear. You remember that thing of Markham's, suggested by Millet's painting, *The Man with the Hoe*. We need something to raise our eyes beyond the immediate anxiety. A great nation can't go along just watching its feet. The kind of words I imagine needn't be very complicated. I'd like to see something simple enough for a child to put his hand on his chest and spout in school on Fridays. I keep looking for it, but I don't see it. Sometimes a great poem can do more than legislation."

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This was Herbert Hoover speaking: a man sometimes rumored to be an unemotional scientist, the economist and engineer, coldly considering human destinies in equations and statistics. It is curious that the man who has had one of the most strangely adventurous careers of modern time should have gained the reputation of being prosaic. The man who helped defend Tientsin against the Boxers, who stood as an independent power between warring nations in Europe, must sometimes smile grimly to himself when some editorialist going berserk on a typewriter keyboard accuses him of being timid. Probably all the really large imaginers were rather soft-spoken people. Perhaps sometimes we need to balance our minds as well as balance the budget.

"What this country needs is a great poem. *John Brown's Body* is a step in the right direction," he continued. "I've read it once, and I'm reading it again. But it's too long to do what I mean. You can't thrill people in three hundred pages. Three hundred words is about the limit. Kipling's *Recessional* really did something to England when it was published. It helped them through a bad time. Let me know if you find any great poems lying around."

Perhaps because it was Leap Year, on February 29th the goddess of Sudden Occasion made me a bold suggestion. Might it be possible, she said, to print something about Herbert Hoover as the scholar, the man of letters, the lover of books? Here is a man who has given to his own university of Stanford one of the most unique collections in modern record, the Hoover War

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Library; who is probably more widely interested in humane letters than any President we ever had. Why don't you write to your friend F. S., who is one of his secretaries, and see if he won't send you something? I did so. And then one day, as I was innocently mulling over my desk, came the words of Gertrude, our delightful telephone operator, a little breathless. "The White House is calling you," she said, with a most delicate exclamation mark in her voice.

It was F. S. "I passed on your suggestion to the President," he said. "I think perhaps something can be done."

"Fine," I said. "Will you send me a little story?"

"No," he said. "The President wants you and your wife to come down and spend the night at the White House. You can form your own opinions."

I was taken aback, as one is when the dull tadpole of the Improbable turns into Actual Frog and leaps into your hand. I babbled some small social apprehensions.

"Don't worry a bit," said F. S. "From the moment you get to the Station you'll be in very competent hands."

Often in fancy I had toyed with the notion of the Unknown Citizen and Mrs. Citizen visiting the White House to form their own impressions of the duty and dignity of government. But I always imagined it would be much more terrifying. One poem that might be attempted would be the simplicity and virtue of the House itself. It is much more than an Executive Mansion, it is the home of an Idea—one of the last

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homes left where an Idea has room to move about. The home where a well-bred Idea has lived for a long time must always be thrilling and enviable to the average proletarian who exists by anxious haphazard. The Idea that lives there is not recognized at once, unless by paradox. At the front door of the White House you are greeted by a Colored man, who has the unspoiled and kindly courtesy of his race. The initials U. S. embroidered on towels and napkins really seem to stand for *us*. Mr. and Mrs. Citizen, arriving in some secret agitation (which after all I think was becoming to them), lost most of their tremors by the time the usher had escorted them upstairs. No, not upstairs but up-elevator, for one of the wise oddities of the White House is that there is no spectacular grand staircase such as one instinctively expects.

It happened to be the very day after the Federal Income Tax had been painfully reckoned and paid, and perhaps the Unknown Citizen was still smarting a little. But he will be more slow to grumble in future, for the United States is a charming host. It strikes just the right note: courtesy and dignity without horrifying swank. A polite attendant met the travelers at the train-gate in Washington. "Mr. Citizen?" he said, calling him by name. "From the White House," he stated, and led the way. The Red Cap followed, greatly pleased; quite a long stroll, while the Citizen mentally revised his notion of the tip for portage. The life of the Unknown Citizen is frequent with small secret schemes and frustrations. He is proud of a trick with a fifty-cent piece, his only parlor accomplishment; he had thought there might even be a

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chance to show this off to the President. He had been guarding a fifty-cent piece for that purpose. But now he gave it to the porter.

The shield of the United States was on the door of the waiting car, and the radiator cap had some sort of emblem of eagle's wings. The Citizen wanted to identify the make of car, but guests do not stare, and he was not smart enough. Mrs. Citizen was more acute in her own realm. "Sugar four cents a pound!" she exclaimed, seeing a Washington grocery sign. But they tried to sit steadfast and not peer about too much. A traffic policeman, recognizing the car, straightened up for a formal salute; then he saw it was not the President, and refrained.

"This is your Rose Bedroom," said the polite usher, "and there's an evening paper. Mrs. Hoover is engaged at the moment, but she will be expecting you for tea in about twenty minutes. If that clock is correct, as I presume it is, that will be at ten minutes to six. I will return for you at that time. The maid and the house-man will be here immediately. There is the evening paper if you wish to read the news."

The government pays chivalrous deference to ladies. It was evident, by the way the servants laid out garments, that the enormous Rose Room (with Andrew Jackson's vast four-poster) was intended for Mrs. Citizen; Mr. C. found himself arranged for in the cozy small chamber adjoining. He was gratified to observe that the active valet had already got the studs into his shirtfront (a task that Mr. C. dislikes) but wished he had thought not to carry these studs, as he has done for

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many years, in a tin box that once held a typewriter ribbon.

Apparently the usher really believed that Citizen was going to sit down quietly and read the *Washington Evening Star*. I assure you he was much too excited to do that. There is no place in the world that an American citizen has a better right to be thrilled by than the White House. He wanted to see everything. He would have liked to study the view from the front windows, but now the shades were drawn, and he supposed that an inquiring phiz, caught peeping round the edge of the blind, would not be seemly. A log fire was nearly laid in the big fireplace, but the strong blast of warmth from an old-fashioned hot-air register made a fire unnecessary. On the mantel was an ornate old marble clock, the one the usher correctly presumed correct, surmounted by a bronze amazon drawing a bow, inscribed ANTIOPE. The writing table—it was a desk Lincoln used, he was told later—was generously supplied with notepaper engraved in gold THE WHITE HOUSE, WASHINGTON. Not usually a good correspondent, it did occur to him that if he could have a day at that table he would very likely write letters to everyone he knew. There was a silver ashtray and plenty of matches. He admired the beautiful old mahogany wardrobes, and an antique trunk or sea-chest of inlaid woods. On the little table by the bed was a well-polished old bell-push, the three buttons of which were inscribed MAID, BUTTONS, BUTLER. On dressing table and center table were tall bunches of fresh flowers, roses and snapdragons. Over the writing table was a painting—the gift of the artist—called

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WELCOME. It showed an ocean liner coming past the Statue of Liberty. One of the serious problems of the White House, the Citizen secretly divined, is what to do with the many works of art that are generously presented. In the bathroom of the suite he admired the solid nineteenth-century fixtures—a wide marble wash-basin, a delicious covered soap-dish of old pink china, once cracked and carefully mended. Soaps and toilet waters, he was pleased to note, were duly American in origin. In the frames of the enormous windows were tucked little home-whittled wooden pegs, to prevent rattling on stormy nights. How good an air of honest simplicity about everything, of things well used and cherished, as in an old country mansion that has always studied a decent frugality. There is nothing parvenu about the White House. It has much the righteous feeling of an ancient château which the Citizens once visited in France. Perhaps there was some destiny behind its present occupation, the Citizen reflected, for he noticed that the three taps in the roomy old bathtub were lettered H. C. H. Mrs. Citizen, a person of better breeding, was a little shocked by her husband's inquisition into everything. He even insisted on reporting to her the titles of the books. On the center table were Lindbergh's *We*; Vandenberg's *The Trail of a Tradition* (which seemed to be a sort of biography of Alexander Hamilton); *The Miracle of Peille* by J. L. Campbell; *The Changing Years* by Norman Hapgood; and *Bread*—not Charles Norris's, but a book about wheat, by Harry Snyder. In the smaller bedroom were one volume of a set called *The Library of Southern Literature* (with the President's own book-

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plate); Odum's *An American Epoch*; Glenway Wescott's *The Grandmothers*; Kathleen Norris's *Saturday's Child*; an odd volume of an old calfbound 16mo set of *Hudibras* (Edinburgh, 1770, with the bookplate of David Steuart, Esqr) and *The Story of San Michele*.

The story is that the first night President Hoover spent in the White House not a readable book was to be found anywhere. Elderly accumulations of gifts had been transferred to the Library of Congress, and the new President had to send out and borrow a volume of history from the Secret Service to read himself to sleep. (Do Presidents sleep well the first night in office? I doubt it. The White House is too full of overtones and memories. There is nothing more real than the subtle awareness of influence in that building. Every creak of the old timber floors is a voice of suggestion.) Perhaps it was a rumor of that episode that caused the American Booksellers' Association in 1930 to give to the nation a carefully chosen miscellany of 500 books "to fit the reading moods of the present and future occupants of the White House and of their guests. It is not a library for reference, but for enjoyment." The selection was made by a committee headed by Mr. Frederic Melcher, the energetic editor of the *Publishers' Weekly*. The books, each with its neat bookplate, now fill a series of white shelves along one side of the broad central corridor that runs the length of the house upstairs. This corridor, which under some earlier tenancies was a passage of sombre formality in mahogany, Mrs. Hoover has made a long living room gay with reading lamps and flowers. Be-

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yond the shelves of the booksellers' gift are many other cases containing the President's own works of reference, ranging from works on mineralogy and mining reports, to the Proceedings of the International Mathematical Congress at Toronto. Here and there on tables are rare old volumes that are part of the history of the house—such as Audubon's *Birds* or N. P. Willis's *American Scenery* (London, George Virtue, 1840) with its quaint engravings. The sprightly Willis made a memorandum to accompany the plate of The President's House, as it was then called. "The residence of the Chief Magistrate," he wrote, "resembles the country-seat of an English nobleman in its architecture and size; but it is to be regretted that the parallel ceases when we come to the grounds." Incidentally, *President's House* is still the legend engraved on all the White House silver.

The White House having so much permanent character of its own, it is surprising that it can also accommodate itself so flexibly to reflect the personality of its tenants. To those who like to analyze character it is at once evident that it is the dwelling of cultivated and scholarly curiosities. In one of the small drawing rooms there are solid elderly sets of Thackeray, Trollope, Dumas, the Waverley Novels, Hawthorne, Holmes, Stevenson, Richard Harding Davis, and the Historians' History of the World. In the colorful oval sitting room, where Mrs. Hoover served tea by an open fire (wearing her uniform as commander of Girl Scouts; she had just returned from one of their meetings) are two beautiful arched recesses of open shelves. These spaces had formerly been china

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cabinets for bric-à-brac, but Mrs. Hoover had them altered to house her own favorites in poetry and belles lettres. The President's reticence in regard to his own private enthusiasms is well known; he does not tell the world when he discovers something that delights him. He has little aptitude for dramatizing himself or publishing his intuitions for all and sundry. It is the more delightful therefore to find this man, beneath his self-respecting reserve, a scholar of great learning and the most infectious humanity. Part of the reason for the complete devotion he has always elicited from his own staff is that fundamental and Quakerish honesty. He is so enormously interested in the job on hand that it would never occur to him to arrange a pose for the benefit of others. It would certainly startle him to have it suggested that there is a "story" in his interest in books: he takes books for granted as an essential part of life. In thinking of him as an engineer one is likely to forget how large a part of his career was spent in long journeys or remote encampments where one must read or perish of ennui. For instance, he has spent over a year and a half of elapsed time on long ocean voyages: crossing the Pacific ten times, the Atlantic over twenty-five times (he has lost exact count); trips to the Cape, to Australia, South America and across Asia. A map of his journeys makes Marco Polo look like a picnicker. (Mrs. Hoover smiles gayly at the tributes paid her as a home-maker, since most of her housekeeping, she says, has been very happily done in a steamer trunk.) To a man of active mind travel implies reading. Mr. Hoover remembers his joy when, starting south from Chefoo in China on a mining ex-

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pedition, he discovered a set of the works of Dumas in forty volumes. Plutarch and Gibbon were other favorite travelling companions. The American Booksellers' gift to the White House was a very welcome one, but as far as the President himself was concerned he had read most of those books long before. He generously took the trouble to tick off on that list of 500 titles those that he had read in days when there was more leisure. In the section of "Standard Fiction," for instance, out of the 56 books listed he had read 50. In the lists of Travel, History, Politics and World Affairs, practically every title was marked. He is an honest reader, too: in the case of titles like Shakespeare, Dante, Tennyson, *Leaves of Grass*, Keyserling's *Travel Diary*, Wells's *Outline of History*, he had noted "Part." Even in so innocent a testimony he would not pretend.

The visitors were looking over those shelves, after tea, when a quiet step came down the corridor. It is well that White House boards have that tactful creak. "Here comes the President," whispered Mrs. Citizen, with just a pleasing touch of awe in her voice—very rare in wives. The Citizen turned from the shelf just in time. The President greets his guests very gently, but he makes them feel instantly at ease. The Citizen was brought up among Philadelphia Quakers, and there was something about the President's voice and intonation, a sense of power under shrewd control, that was memorably familiar. "Looking at the books?" he said. "If they sent those here to educate me, I'm afraid it was too late. I'd read eighty-five per cent of them before." There spoke the man of instinctive

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precision. Not "most of them" or "nearly all of them," but "eighty-five per cent."

Experienced travellers are not only great readers but also great distributors, because books are burdensome to transport. Both the President and Mrs. Hoover have at various times formed unusual collections of books on special subjects and then given them away. Mrs. Hoover for some years gathered rare works on China, including the writings of early Jesuit missionaries, narratives of Western explorers in the Orient, and books on Chinese art. This collection included items so rare that they were possessed neither by the British Museum nor the Bibliothèque Nationale. It was presented to Stanford University. And anyone who has ever examined the remarkable book on which Mr. and Mrs. Hoover collaborated, their edition of Agricola's mining treatise *De Re Metallica*, will pay tribute to the wide scholarship and patient application shown in its critical apparatus. It was translated from the Latin edition of 1556, "with biographical introduction, notes and appendices on Mining Methods, Metallurgical Processes, Geology, Mineralogy and Mining Law from earliest times to the 16th century." One may imagine that a library of reference must have been amassed for this task alone, which they modestly describe as having been accomplished "in night hours, week-ends and holidays, over a period of about five years." Even at the Rapidan camp in Virginia a considerable collection has already accumulated, a library of fishing lore and books dealing with the plant and animal life of the Blue Ridge country. And always

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when the President goes there for a week-end the most interesting volumes that have appeared at the White House during the week are packed up and taken along on the chance there may be time to look them through.

As the visitors returned to the Rose Bedroom to dress for dinner they could not help glancing across the hall through the open door of the President's study. Two large flags stood in the far corners, the Stars and Stripes and the dark blue Presidential flag. An easy chair of dark orange leather was drawn near the desk, and beside it lay a newspaper tossed down after reading. A reading lamp shone brightly on the desk, on a large pen-stand ornamented with green elephants (a political symbol?) and a neat pile of small leather notebooks. A faint trail of cigar fragrance crossed the whiff of flowers in the corridor. It was just such a domestic interior as one might see in any well-ordered home where the head of the house, returning from the office about six-thirty, sits down for a few moments in his favorite chair to look at the paper.

Here I have to encourage my friend Citizen to continue his observations in this humble vein. One does not accept personal hospitality and then make public comment on it, seemed to be the thought that was bothering him. I tried to convince him that there was no breach of respect involved. Americans are so rarely allowed a glimpse of the Chief Magistrate off duty that they are prone to forget that he is also a very human being. Perhaps more than any other high officer on earth he is the target of incessant criticism: some of it constructive and valid, much of it partisan

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and hearsay. A good deal of it may be as unfair as to hold the captain of a liner responsible for the weather encountered during the voyage. The Presidency has certainly its emotional and sentimental phases, but it is primarily a highly organized business job: there is not much leisure to be mystical about it. Perhaps we ought to learn to safeguard the office more carefully against the loss of energy involved in seeing too many axe-grinding callers. At any rate it is reassuring to see the head of the firm going ahead with his work so calmly, so steadily, so undramatically. Working a great deal harder, the Citizen realized, than you or I. In a business where I am a stockholder I am glad to see a quiet man at the head of the outfit.

But if you begin to think too carefully about the problem of government under modern conditions, the varying interests and prejudices to be composed, the mysterious powers of publicity, the number of acute adversaries ready to turn to their own account the word too naïvely spoken, you will likely say nothing. So, in a mood of honor, you can only put down your own actual impressions.

Certainly my friend Citizen is unfitted to offer opinion on matters of State. He may listen all evening to discussions of finance and banking procedure, but there is some obstruction in his head that makes those topics opaque to him. Yet he is susceptible to human emanations. Is it too informal for him to say that nothing more endeared the President than the fact that his dress shirt, like yours and mine, tends to billow up under his chin? Or that, dining en famille, Mrs. Hoover calls him "Daddy"? It probably is. But

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even in that huge dining room of State, where over eighty can sit for an official function, one cannot be shy when one hears that oldest and kindest of names cross the table. The eye may be startled by an upward glimpse of the great silver chandelier overhead—as broad as the round table beneath it. The panelled walls, the blazing fire, and a vaguely descried portrait above it seem a long way off. But anything one might have been told about the severities of White House etiquette vanishes under so cordial a spell. Even, for a fractional instant, the colored butler noiselessly appearing with a napkin-swathed bottle startled the renegade guest with a sudden secret amazement. It was only mineral water.

Dinner, served at eight o'clock, was satisfying and simple; there was something very American about it. A thick soup, fish, meat and vegetables, salad with cheese and crackers, a sweet, and fruit. Perhaps the most American feature was the rapidity with which it was served. Somehow Citizen got the impression that the President has perhaps been put on a diet, and is glad to get past the temptations of the table as soon as possible, to escape to his study for coffee and cigars. He took no sweet, and Mrs. Citizen (who sat at his right) avers that he regarded hers with something of wistfulness; exactly (she says) as Citizen himself does when he is hoping she won't finish something rather special but allow him to do so for her. At any rate one presumed that it was not polite to go on eating after the President's plate is finished; and that means brisk going.

Perhaps there is a clue in this. The President is

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not much interested in food as a pastime, or in merely casual chat for the sake of casual chat. He is interested in Ideas. How well Mrs. Hoover understands this and plays team. At the table at first he said little, and Mrs. Hoover took the lead. But as soon as anything emerged that caught his imagination his chin came up from the bulge of his shirtfront, he caught Mrs. Hoover's eye and began to talk. His voice is low, one has to listen sharply. He talks with much humor, the humor of underemphasis which does not lend itself easily to quotation.

There were only three of us in the President's study after dinner. (I abandon the phantom of Citizen, who has served his turn for the moment.) On the mantel a ship's clock from the former yacht *Mayflower* tingled nautical bells. The colored attendant lit the fire, and the President brightened it with great California pine cones. The inner walls are lined with glazed bookcases and rows of rather sombre legal or official-looking volumes, including the writings of all the Presidents. On a low table was a large silver cigarette box engraved with facsimile autographs of the President's associates in the Belgian Relief. Coffee was served, with granulated sugar. I saw no lump sugar in the White House. Is this a fidelity to the old thrift of Food Administration times? On a bench by the big couch was a clean memo-pad and half a dozen beautifully sharpened pencils. You find these pads and pencils waiting ready on occasional tables everywhere throughout the living rooms. They must be a great joy to the grandchildren when they visit. All the

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children's toys, by the way, are carefully arranged in the cross alcove off the main corridor, where Lincoln used to stride to and fro in the dark nights of the Civil War. There is a huge rocking horse, and an old wooden cradle waiting for Peggy Ann's dolls. The walls of this little alcove are lined with the framed diplomas of the President's honorary degrees from universities all over the world, an extraordinary collection. There you see both ends of Mr. Hoover's wide human spectrum. He is interested in Ideas, and he is interested in children. The great engineer is always concerned with new sources of power. What is the greatest power-plant any nation can possess? The kinetic possibility of its youth. How is this force to be harnessed? My friend F. S., one of the confidential secretaries, told me that he had had to prepare some notes for a speech the President made at the recent Conference on Child Welfare. He made some allusion to the boundless energy of young childhood; the feeling of exhausted relief—familiar to all parents—with which we see them at last housed for the night. "We put them to bed with a sense of relief," said F. S.'s memorandum. The President was not satisfied with this. He added at once "and a lingering of devotion." There is no parent in the world who does not understand that perfect phrase. There are many such in "The Children's Charter," which Mr. Hoover wrote largely with his own hand. It begins thus:

*For every child spiritual and moral training to help him to stand firm under the pressure of life.*

What man in our time has known more of that pressure?

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The emotional and imaginative elements in Mr. Hoover lie, carefully reserved, only a little below the surface, but he is no sentimentalist. It is Ideas that evoke his enthusiasm; as he talks, his right foot begins to tap a light unconscious tattoo on the floor. As he drew near the end of his long cigar I feared that might end the session, but he replenished the hearth himself, threw on more of the California cones (he likes the suggestion of Western freedom that these bring) and started another havana. He enjoys a blaze on the hearth, and in the fireplace of the mind too. His bookplate had been mentioned—a reproduction of a medieval mining print. He spoke with zest of the incunabula of science, and said that at the dawn of recorded history men had already discovered some of the technical processes still in use today. The Greek miners at Laurium, southeast of Athens, used the same means of separating silver from lead that the modern scientist does. "It would be interesting," he said, "to rewrite Greek history from the viewpoint of a mining engineer. It was the silver mines of Laurium that paid for the fleet with which Themistocles won the battle of Salamis—one of the great turning points of history. The first great orations of Demosthenes were arguments on cases of mining titles. Thucydides was connected with gold mines in Thrace." He spoke of the professional training of mining engineers, which first began in this country. "Elsewhere they were still apprentices or advanced mechanics. That was why, in the early days, the American engineers were getting all the best jobs."

He was asked whether a young mining engineer look-

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ing for advancement now would find great opportunity in the Soviets. The reply was crisp. "There are more minerals in Montana than in the whole of Russia."

The President's bookplate is a reproduction of one of the woodcuts in a very early book on mining, "Ein Nützlich Bergbüchlin von Allen Metallen" of 1527. In speaking of this he was on his hobby and it was delightful to see him sparkle. His interest in the old German miner Georgius Agricola (whose baptismal name was Georg Bauer) is not merely technical but again broadly pragmatic: Agricola made solid contribution to human progress. Why did Mr. and Mrs. Hoover wrestle for five years with the severe task of putting Agricola's antique Latin technology into satisfactory English? "The book was a milestone on the road of civilization," he says. "Except the Book of Genesis, the only attempts to explain natural phenomena had been those of the Greek philosophers and the alchemists. For 180 years" (note, he says "180 years," not "nearly two centuries") "that book was a guide for miners and metallurgists. There is no measure to gauge the benefits enjoyed by humanity through such a work." Mrs. Hoover was a full-time collaborator in the arduous work on this volume. She has an exceptional talent for languages, and Latin is a hobby of hers. This may encourage some high school girls now wrestling with declensions.

Looking up the *De Re Metallica* afterward, I found that Mr. Hoover had written:

*It is more worthy of preservation than the thousands of volumes devoted to records of human destruction.*

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When this was published in 1912, little could he have guessed how much he himself would soon see of the wreckage of human destruction. I could not help observing, too, in an extract from Duke Maurice's grant of land to Agricola in 1546, a pleasantly contemporary savor:

. . . *And that he may also, for the necessities of his household, brew his own beer free, and that he may likewise purvey for himself and his household foreign beer and also wine for use, and yet he shall not sell any such beer.*

The *De Re Metallica* is a great book, and in his notes on the text Mr. Hoover writes crisply, as he talks. Of Martin Luther he says, "His Latin was execrable." Of Livy's famous yarn about Hannibal breaking up the Alpine rocks with fire and vinegar he remarks, "A study of the commentators would fill a volume with sterile words." He roams freely among allusions to Xenophon, Aristotle, Strabo, Pliny, Josephus.

Mary Austin has told how in 1908 Mr. Hoover motored her from London down to Kent to pay her respects to Joseph Conrad. Mr. Hoover, though also a reader of Conrad, was too shy to join their conversation and stayed outside in the car. What a pity! For how much he might have told Conrad about the silver mines of *Nostromo*.

One does not quote the President of the United States on controversial matters. Yet one has never met a man more worth quoting. He speaks with amazing frankness, and with no trimming of words to

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please possible favoritisms of the listener. He returns repeatedly to certain conceptions that are fundamental. "We need to get back to greater simplicity. Things are not accomplished by money, or by men, or by government, but by Ideas." I had an obscure vision of a certain kind of patriotism that does not move to music and is not very spectacular. One feels these things in that room. Just behind me was the tablet under the mantel which says that there the Emancipation Proclamation was signed. The old yellow desk, elaborately carved, was built from the timbers of an American whaler that rescued the polar expedition of Sir John Franklin and was afterward wrecked on the English coast. Queen Victoria had the desk made from the wreck and sent it to the White House. A *study* is the right name for that room: it is full of thought. In the days that have gone by since that visit I have not been able to put that room out of my mind. It is not large. Mussolini, or the president of a big life insurance company, would probably want something more full of tricks. The President spoke of the influence the White House exerts on its occupants. "No one can live here without wanting to do his best. Even men of small stature have been lifted above themselves."

"But I keep thinking," I said, "of the man on whom this enormous responsibility rests. Is it on his mind always, or does he ever get a chance, for a little while, not to think about it?"

"I don't want not to think about it."

The second cigar was finished, the fire had burned low. The *Mayflower* clock chimed five bells—10:30.

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The President led the way to rejoin the ladies. And there, after a few minutes, "Well," he said, "there are some people in this house who have to get up early in the morning."

In their own suite the Citizens found a generous dish of fruit set out in each bedroom. With the insouciance of a good conscience, Mrs. Citizen slumbered prompt and sound under her broad canopy. (It was not until breakfast that the President told her humorously that that bed is famous for deaths; there is an old print in the White House that shows President William Henry Harrison expiring in it.) But on his more modest couch her husband found himself too tense for sleep. Not *Hudibras* nor even *San Michele* seemed to meet his needs. Fortunately he had a detective story with him, and that kept his mind from revolving too loosely. He smoked a pipe, taking care to bestow the ashes discreetly in the fireplace. Crumpled on top of the logs he noticed a scrap of paper; with sleuthing instinct he unrolled it. Would this be some discarded memorandum of State? Scribbled on it was the notation *chocolate cake*. This was mysterious, but it seemed to confirm his intuition that the White House is a very human place. He observed that an old Biblical engraving on the wall had once belonged to the French, for it was stamped *Ministère de l'Intérieure*. The gold-embossed stationery tempted him, and he would have liked to write some sort of manifesto; but what? Several times, after wooing unconsciousness, he turned on the light again to read further. But by two o'clock he did not like to do this again. Perhaps there are

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watchmen or guards about the grounds, he considered. What will they think if they see the light going on and off? The repute of the proletariat was at stake. He lay dubious in the dark. Distant sounds of traffic came faintly from outside. Antiope rang various half-hours. The White House must have known many sleepless nights, he reflected. He heard Lincoln's slow footsteps cross the hall; he heard the quick tread of Roosevelt, the massive trudge of Taft, the long pace of Wilson. To this house all these men and their women too had given something: some more, some less, but what they had. He kept remembering what Mr. Hoover had said about the need of a poem. It would need courage to say in public anything so simply true. Among the shadowy walkers in that corridor was one tall homely wraith who would have understood the sooth of it; who in one prose poem of less than three hundred words said thoughts that have not perished from the earth.

His final thought was a vote of confidence. The President is a good man, he said to himself. He pronounces *economics* correctly, with a long *e*. Beware of statesmen who call it *eckonomics*!

It is a rash impertinence to comment on any man's taste in reading, which is one of the few privacies left us; but the list the President marked offers valuable comment on his character. He was not interested in wildcat mining, he does not care for wildcat literature. There is a strong sense of reality in his book choices. Hysterias and fantasticoes of post-War taste have mostly passed him by. His tastes in fiction were

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formed in the Golden Age of reading, the Nineties. He sank his shafts deep into the solid ore of Balzac, Brontë, Cooper, Dickens, Dumas, George Eliot, Bret Harte, Hawthorne, Howells, Kipling, Meredith, Scott, Stevenson, Thackeray, Mark Twain. There is a word he is fond of which expresses his faculty: *empirical*. His intuitions are based on practical experiment. As a field geologist knows by the lay of the terrain what reefs are likely below, he knows what kind of book has precious metal for him. There is nothing austere in his choice; he enjoyed the same thrillers and comedians that you and I were reared on a little later: Jules Verne, Conan Doyle, Rider Haggard, W. W. Jacobs, *Ruggles of Red Gap*. He seeks a good story, not whipped-cream fantasy or tinsel cynicism. When anyone remarks that he can find no leisure to read, consider this man of packed concerns who has found time for Arnold Bennett, Barrie, Donn Byrne, Conrad, Winston Churchill, Mrs. Deland, Jack London, Wells, Galsworthy, Frank Norris, O. Henry, Emerson Hough, Du Maurier, Weir Mitchell, W. H. Hudson. Though not a great zealot of the detective story he knows his Sherlock Holmes, Agatha Christie, Anna Katharine Green, Mary Roberts Rinehart, S. S. Van Dine. Among later American novelists his favorites seem to be Thomas Nelson Page, Tarkington, Edith Wharton, Stewart Edward White, Willa Cather, Sinclair Lewis, Harry Leon Wilson, Zane Grey. There can hardly ever have been a President who has read so much and said so little about it. His gusto is not narrow nor to be labelled in any conventional class. Among American novels he has enjoyed you will find

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such diverse titles as *The Honorable Peter Stirling*, *To Have and To Hold*, *A Certain Rich Man*, *Giants in the Earth*, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, *Vandemark's Folly*, *The Private Life of Helen of Troy*.

Any bookman must delight to see with what sagacious instinct Mr. Hoover has chosen the things that had genuine quartz, and has passed by the showy or ephemeral tailings that publishers are sometimes loud to applaud. Take him on history: he knows his James Bryce, John Fiske, Parkman, Prescott, James Ford Rhodes, Trevelyan, Truslow Adams. Among the poets he has checked Chaucer, Dante, Goethe, Homer, Keats, Masfield, Tennyson, Whitman, Whitcomb Riley, and Carl Sandburg. There is just one book he hasn't read which I hope he will some day find time for. I'd love to know what he would think of *Moby Dick*.

The President was right: they *did* get up early. By seven o'clock he is ready, in leather jacket and old crumpled hat, for the morning game of medicine ball with a group of his official associates. It was a drizzling March morning, and the grass tennis court at the foot of the White House lawn showed broad slithers of mud in which a Supreme Court justice or a solicitor general can slide as impartially as an Unknown Citizen. The White House pets—a Norwegian elkhound and a big gray police dog—frolic on the outskirts of the play and follow the group back to an informal dining room in the basement where coffee and grapefruit are served. Weejee, the elkhound, a lovable creature very like a husky, wears an ingenious leather moccasin on a

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crippled foot. He sat up in an empty chair next the President and shared his toast.

The medicine-ball game is more exciting than the name sounds. It is played like deck tennis, with the massive leather sphere as missile, and tennis scoring. Certain special rules have had to be made, the President remarked, on account of the unusual tallness of one of the frequent players, Dr. Wilbur, Secretary of the Interior. The group have played this game every weekday morning for three years and are very adept; it involves a high competence of knack and strength and is fairly exhausting to the beginner. There is brisk masculine chaff among the others as they scramble to and fro (Mr. Justice Stone has a particularly deadly heave), but the President plays with more silent concentration. For the moment the game is the only thing in his mind. It is not just a game but also a means of keeping fit. Afterward he trots all the way back to the House, followed by the capering dogs. Passers-by outside the grounds perhaps only see in the distance a group of middle-aged men tossing a very heavy and muddy ball over a high net. Another might see in it a symbol of an even larger sphere which the courage and good will of men must keep in air. Occasionally it goes off the court and a point is lost. But they always bring it back.

There are fifteen minutes of coffee and talk round the basement club table. The talk is casual and offhand, the coffee deliberated and perfect. The regular breakfast is upstairs in a small cozy room with a blazing fire. Grapefruit and hominy and bacon and eggs, and more of that exquisite coffee. A curious hunk of brown woody

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substance was put by the President's plate. Citizen thought it might be some special tidbit for the dogs, who stay very close to the President's chair. Mrs. Citizen imagined it some sort of gluten bread. It was a burl (or knot) from a redwood tree; soaked in a bowl of water, it sends up delicate spires of baby redwood. This was for Mrs. Citizen to take home to the children. After breakfast the President walks across to his office, accompanied by Mrs. Hoover who always sees him cheerfully to his desk. He is at work by 8:30.









